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# HONOUR'S WORTH

OR

THE COST OF A VOW.



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## THE COST OF A VOW.

A Novel.

BY META ORRED,

AUTHOR OF "POEMS," "A LONG TIME AGO."

"I could not love Thee, dear, so much  
Loved I not Honour more."—RICHARD LOVELACE.

"Der seltne Mann will  
Seltenes vertrauen."—WALLENSTEIN.

*Prospero.* "Foolish wench!  
To the most of men this is a Caliban,  
And they to him are angels.

*Miranda.* My affections  
Are then most humble; I have no ambition  
To see a goodlier man."—*Tempest.*

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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1878.

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# HONOUR'S WORTH;

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## THE COST OF A VOW.



### CHAPTER I.

GLADYS sat at the end of the upper terrace—diconsolate and alone. Disko, huddled into a small ball of paws and head, watched her with keen eyes, and was busily employed in alternately puffing out his cheeks and drawing them in again, like an india-rubber ball with a hole in it. Gladys, with her chin sunk in her hand, like an ivory ball resting in a cup; and letting the red gravel silt through her slender fingers like golden water, was pondering over the change in everything within the last two months. Quarl was gone to Cannes (leaving his familiar ape with Gladys), to look after Colonel Myddleton, he said. Hermione had returned to her home, fifty miles away, and carrying Robert with her, was now deeply engrossed in getting the estate into order; and wrote of nothing but drain-

ing, building new cottages, and making new roads. Sir Philip smiled ominously over the eager letters and observed that it was lucky Hermione had so much money she really did not know what to do with it.

Lady Clinton sent exquisite designs for cottages, and said, with a little unnecessary warmth, that men always thought they knew everything, and what better could Hermione do with the money she drew from the estate than put it back again? "And I am sure, Phil, if Ione does care for such dry things as drains it is a mercy!"

"Very dry, my dear, and don't they absorb a good deal of money? that's all!"

"Well, it's money well sunk!"

"Sunk, indeed! and deep, deep, deep."

"Phil, you are so disagreeable!"

"I'll tell you what, Dor, I shall go over and look after Master Bob, soon."

"Oh, do, and take me, too!"

"I wonder how you will get on with old Mrs. Match? Such a name! Really Miss St. John might have had a little more consideration for our ears," he said, laughing. "If Robert only grows a little *tinder* the whole concern will blow up."

"What an atrocious, vulgar joke!" said Lady Clinton. "So bad, I won't laugh at you. Ah! I see Mr. Crosbie talking to Gladys; they will come in directly, I suppose."

Mr. Crosbie came hopping up the terraces from



the wilderness, like a bright-eyed blackbird, and startled Gladys from her reverie.

“Well, little lady! You don’t look quite what I want—Melancholia and her monkey—(she had no business with a monkey, though.)—Come here, small imp, and have your sugar!”

Disko cautiously advanced one paw, clinging tightly to Gladys with the other.

Gladys had got up, and stood smiling whilst two, three, four lumps of sugar swelled those omnivorous cheeks. “Stop, stop!” she said at last. “He’ll be ill; really, a sick monkey is not a pretty object, poor little soul!”

“There! that’s all you’ll get, my small one, so grin and dance in vain. I am sure I was just like that monkey when I was small,” he said, meditatively stroking the frill of his shirt front; and then, “It’s a long time since you have been down in the village, Gladys,” he said, turning quickly round on her.

“Yes; I want very much to go and see Mr. Fairfax again, and hear some more music.”

“Well, why not come to-day, then? I’ll take you. I am going there now, and that is just where I want you to go.”

“Why?” said Gladys, making very large eyes.

“But not if you look so melancholy as you did a short while ago. I want you to go down there and brisk up my dear Josline.”

"Is she ill?" said Gladys, anxiously.

"No, not at all, only too angelic. Somehow, the look the young artist man put into her eyes in the Eurydice picture is growing there, and I do not altogether like it."

Disko, who sat with one paw holding his chin tightly, in exact imitation of Quarl, here uttered a little shriek of pleasure, and they saw Lady Clinton coming down the broad steps from the stone seat.

"Ah!" she said, shaking her hand threateningly at Mr. Crosbie. "How do you expect me to receive you? You've been ever so long away."

"Well, I thought you were busy; and if you wish to know, I have been consoling the aged General for the loss of his son."

"Stupid old man! but I'm rather sorry for him, too. Well, I suppose they will get the place in order by degrees. Miss St. John is working night and day, only she will employ those country workmen, because she says it's good for the village, so she will have to wait twice the time. She has, though, got a London overseer. Well, she and Robert must be having great fun, really. I long to go and see them both. Philip is going soon, and I am so anxious to know how they are all getting on with that queer, old Mrs. Match—such a name!"

"She is a good old person, though; I know all about her."

"Do you? What on earth made Hermione take her?"

“Well, she was Sir Mark’s old governess, or, more properly speaking, *gouvernante*, and by some extraordinary oversight in making his will was not pensioned or anything, and she had always lived at Enderby, and Miss St. John thought it would be cruel to turn her out, so there she is.”

“That is just like that dear Hermione,” said Lady Clinton. “Is she a very, very cantankerous old person, or too much of a tabby?”

“Not at all. She is a tiny, fairy godmother of a woman, most gentle and silent, with one idea in the world—Sir Mark’s memory. She persisted in always calling Miss St. John ‘my lady,’ and I don’t know whether they will ever be quite able to break her of it.”

“Oh, I dare say she is very nice! Mark always did like nice people, poor fellow!”

“I don’t think she is *quite* what you would call a lady, you know.”

“That doesn’t matter an atom,” said Lady Clinton. “I shall try and make her like me when we go there for the house-warming, I always feel so uncomfortable unless all the old belongings in a house like me.”

“Most people do like you,” answered Mr. Crosbie, with a kindly smile. “I shouldn’t think you ever said things to hurt people’s feelings.”

“Oh, I hope not, indeed! It’s like pulling off the wings of a fly, to hurt people’s feelings.”

"I will go and chain up Disko, Mr. Crosbie, if you will wait, and then may I walk down with you?"

"Is Gladys going to Old Court with you? Then I will order the pony carriage to follow and bring her back," said Lady Clinton. "I like her to go and see Josline Fairfax," she added, as Gladys ran up the slope out of hearing. "There is something so gentle and sweet about that girl; and then I think it nice for her hearing Mr. Fairfax play; she is really very fond of music and she hears so little of it. I don't think, somehow, her visit to old Lady Dunstable did her much good."

Mr. Crosbie's eyes twinkled. "Ah, ah!" he said, "Miss Thorold and she do not agree, I think?"

"No; she is a heartless little thing, and Gladys really feels things too much."

"Well, she will outgrow that peculiarity of youth. One must be always worshipping something, I suppose; in after life it's one's self, which is so much less trouble."

"Mr. Crosbie, how can you say such things?" said Lady Clinton, reproachfully. "I never knew any one more unselfish than you are."

"Because it happens to be the least trouble to myself," he answered, quickly.

"I don't know, I think you are often very anxious about Josline Fairfax——"

"Ah! but then I love her! How foolish I am!" he broke off, laughing. "I am arguing against my-

self! But that reminds me I am anxious about her. Miss Barbara doesn't half understand anything so sensitive; and dear old Fairfax is completely puzzled, and as long as she smiles and sings to him, thinks all is right, but," and the old man's voice had a ring of anguish in it, "it's not all right. I know my child! Have I not held her in my arms from a little one, and kissed her many times when she has hurt herself, and taught her strange arts? I know her! There is something about her I don't *like*, Lady Clinton."

"What?" said Lady Clinton, stopping and looking up at him.

He was silent for a moment or two, looking straight up at the cloudy, breezy sky. He half closed his eyes and frowned heavily, then he sighed and said, turning round and tucking his hands under his coat tails, "I don't know. There is an angelic look; her brow is so broad, her eyes so large, her mouth so small, and there is a pinch over the eyes and by the nostrils."

His voice quavered, otherwise Lady Clinton, though she sympathized, felt inclined to smile at his quaint way of expressing himself.

"Young girls have often a very delicate look," she ventured to say.

"It isn't that," he answered. "She isn't a young girl only. She represses herself, and repression, to a nature like Josline's, is death."

His voice was very grave now, and low. Lady Clinton's mouth steadied.

"What do you wish? What would you like? Is there anything I can do?" she said.

"I don't know at present; but do let Gladys go down there more; and isn't that young artist coming down here? Yes? Then do try and get her up here."

"Up here? But they would never let her come!" said Lady Clinton, in amazement.

"We don't know. I feel imperatively that she must have change; distraction——"

At this moment Gladys came running down the slope again; and she and Mr. Crosbie set off for the village.

Mr. Fairfax was playing in his den. The windows were open; a jessamine leant in inquiringly, stealing her five-pointed fingers round the edge of the window-frame, and sending arrowy shoots and thrills of perfume through the low, dusky room. Josline was sitting by the window, ostensibly mending Pharaoh's eye, but the needle had fallen from her fingers, and was lying on the damask napkin; her eyes were resting on the turf outside, and on the nut walk, where the bushes were just starting into full leaf, and the laburnums beginning that wonderful droop that is the forerunner of such plummy gold. She was altered in appearance; so far Mr. Crosbie was right. The dreamy repose of manner had deepened, the marvellous serenity of look on the brow and in the eyes had strengthened, and, most remarkable of all, on the ivory-tinted cheek, there shone now a brilliant hue of



exquisite colour, and in the eyes a steady, ambient, yet dewy light. A casual observer would have thought she had always looked like this, but any one knowing her well would have said: the flower has opened. There was knowledge, life, and love in those eyes. It was the same exquisite face that had looked out on the autumn night, barely six months ago, but the soul knew itself now—the flower could never close again.

Mr. Crosbie wronged the kind old uncle. He did not think “all was right;” he thought far differently, but he knew nothing. He thought a young girl’s heart was too sacred and pure a thing for a man to handle. He thought she grieved for the loss of a young man’s presence and voice and love. And so she did; but with what sad difference to his imaginings! Alas! how blind we are where we love most! He was playing very softly now, drawing sounds from his familiar that might have melted the very wood that brought them forth.

“Anima mia,” he said, gently, “would you sing ‘Che farò,’ if I play?”

He only said this because he wanted to break the spell of undefined sadness that oppressed him like a dissonance.

Josline turned her head and smiled at him. “Always, when you like,” she said, and began singing *sotto voce*. Gradually her colour faded, her voice sank lower and lower, and she raised her hand

and held out her dress, as though even that slight weight oppressed and stifled her.

"You might have sung louder," said her godfather's reproachful voice in the doorway, as she ended.

She turned her head languidly, and looked at him, and Gladys, who was following closely, was struck by the curious expression of relief on her face, as though she had been infinitely relieved from a sore burden by his opportune entrance.

The two young girls went off to the cedar parlour, and Mr. Crosbie went searching amongst Mr. Fairfax's old books.

"This is a curious old book on monks and their doings," he said, at last.

"Ah?" said Mr. Fairfax, interrogatively, drawing his bow gently and murmuringly across the strings.

"I want to read up some books on monastic institutions; haven't you got a good many?"

"Yes—I had, at least. I destroyed some of them—once," said Mr. Fairfax, colouring faintly. "I thought it well over, read everything I could lay my hands on, and—thought the fire might as well have some of them."

"Why? what an idea!"

"Ephemeræ," murmured the player. "Untruths."

"There must be a good deal of truth, though, in what has held ground so long."

Mr. Fairfax drew a long note out, bending down



his head in silence; then he threw it up suddenly, a burning light came into his eyes. "There was," he said, "a noble, god-like truth in the beginning, but they wrapped it round in forms till they stifled it; and they tried to force a man's soul. No creed will stand that. Instead of a living, pulsing, working existence, they tried to deaden all feeling, kill back all ambition and noble endeavour. Ah! I know," he said, with a vibrating energy, "that life as a negation is an impossibility. Force back your soul, crush it, stun it, it will burst out at unforeseen issues, and grow in deadly and poisonous growth, for it is infinite; and how can finite beings control it with rules of empty meaning?"

Mr. Crosbie stood silent and amazed. At last he said, "And yet self-sacrifice and self-negation are wonderful and excellent."

"They are, they are. But what opportunity have you for real self-sacrifice in a monastic life? Renounce all, if you will; go into the highways and byways of life, gather together the outcasts, the forlorn, the forsaken; give up to them your time, your thoughts, your worldly wealth; use your talents for them, teach them, guide them. That is self-sacrifice, in the highest acceptation of the term; you are working for God and Eternity. But to sit at ease in a cloistered house, to say so many prayers a day, to drone through life, obeying a senseless rule and observance; to feel no care for the morrow, for aught or

any ; well knowing that nothing can, humanly speaking, alter your lot ; to be satisfied to be as other men are not ; to leave to others the toil, the struggle, the self-abnegation, the small loving-kindnesses that to some are like opening a grave of sorrow to themselves ;—that, to me, is a state of life so utterly and essentially selfish, as to be fit only for devils, not men.”

“My dear Fairfax ! and yet they are praying for others.”

“*Laborare est orare*. As it is, I think, we are over-anxious about our own souls—when we think of nothing but vain repetitions we may forget even them——”

Mr. Crosbie put down the book thoughtfully. “You speak as one having authority, Fairfax, but then, you are necessarily biased against that creed.”

“Ah ! no,” he answered, half indignantly. “Do not do me that injustice. In many ways I think more highly of their practice, at any rate, than our own. I do not hold by creeds ; I believe in one God and Father of us all, and I believe that, though I may never live to see it, in a not very remote future we shall all hold to one Church, which may be called what you will, but will be Universal.”

His noble, grave head seemed illuminated by the earnestness with which he spoke—an earnestness that thrilled like light over his whole face ; and his thin, white hands trembled with repressed excitement.

Then there was a short silence. Then Mr. Crosbie said, "And how about convents for women?"

Mr. Fairfax turned slowly round, and as he did so his eyes fell on the lily heart. A look of ineffable tenderness came over his face. "Men must work, and want women to love them and help them; but after fifty, if they have no claims that God has sent them, let them pray," he said, solemnly.

"Amen," answered Mr. Crosbie; then he said, "And yet, that is like giving the Almighty what remains of their life, and none of the first purity and strength."

"It is giving fruit, not a blossom which may wither and bear none. What merit lies in yielding up what you do not value? what you have never gauged?"

"True," was the laconic answer.

Mr. Fairfax wandered into a fugue of Bach's, and there was silence. He went on, drawing out silvery tones, and at length held one string till the whole room seemed full of a piercing silence, like a thread of light long drawn out through water; the sound appeared to be coming nearer and nearer, an actual embodiment of harmony, finally ending in a triumphant burst and almost thunder of chords.

They heard it in the cedar parlour. Miss Barbara held up one finger, and they sat silent. "How Dux is playing to-day!" she said. "I don't like him to wring the strings so, it must hurt that old fiddle; I

am sure it will crack some day. And, really, a fiddle one has had for generations in the family, one ought to keep in its satin bag I think, and not torture in that way."

Miss Barbara was in a pleasant, bitter-sweet mood to-day. She had a row of preserve jars before her, and was tying on fresh covers, whilst Josline wrote out the names on tiny labels, and pasted them neatly on each jar in turn. Gladys sat on the broad window-seat, with the "person of the house" by her. She was watching Josline, and thinking over Mr. Crosbie's words. She did not see much amiss; what struck her most, perhaps, was an increased brilliancy of colouring in cheek and eye. Just above Josline, as she stood at this moment, hung the picture of Mistress Margaret, and Gladys, glancing upwards, saw the strong resemblance with a force she had never before experienced. She got down and walked across the room to look at the picture.

"Miss Fairfax," she said, "do you not think Josline is wonderfully like Mistress Margaret?"

Miss Barbara looked up quickly. "What a notion!" she said, with asperity. "I hope Josline does not think of such follies—no!" Underneath these words a sharp pain leapt at Miss Barbara and shook her. She had always thought Josline more or less like this picture, and it frightened her to think so; consequently, another person's identical thought irritated her like a sting.

Josline looked quietly up at Gladys and smiled ; she liked to think she resembled that picture, but, in smiling, her expression altered so completely that the likeness to the sad, white face died out instantaneously.

“Have you heard how your cousin, young Watt, is getting on?” said Miss Barbara, from no interest in him, but wishing to change the subject, and therefore plunging, with happy perspicuity, on one still less to her taste.

“Oh, very well indeed. He likes the place so much, and Hermione is so good to him, and they are hard at work. Enderby is most beautiful, I believe ; we are going there later on. They are so busy rebuilding cottages and repairing roads and draining, that she won’t do anything at present to the house and grounds, and he says that all the old gates of iron scroll-work are still chained and padlocked, and make the park look rather dreary.”

“Miss St. John is most wise, and I hope you young ladies will follow in her good ways, some day,” said Miss Barbara, shortly. “The only thing I cannot understand is, how she came to take that young boy for her steward.”

“Well, I think she thought it would be kind to him, dear fellow,” said Gladys, laying her fingers tightly along pussy’s fur, till the silver coat stood up between them. “She is so good and unselfish, and wanted very much to help him on ; and they are

great friends, you know. Hermione always liked him, and thinks him so straightforward."

"Well, of course, you know your cousin better than I do. He has pleasant manners, but he is a great philanderer, I think," said Miss Barbara, tightly fastening an oiled string round a pickle jar. "I don't care for young men who hang about and smoke."

"But he had nothing to do," urged Gladys, whose cheeks began to burn at hearing her idol thus roughly spoken of, "and he smoked very little. Why, I know Philip smokes six and eight cigars a day, and Bob never smokes more than three. I think smoking keeps people out of mischief often. I know he said it was a comfort."

Miss Barbara gave a dangerous sniff.

"A comfort! Everybody thinks of comfort, now. In my day, I was taught to think of comforting others, not being comforted myself; not that I wanted it, either. What you have got to bear, you may as well bear, and make no fuss."

Josline was kneeling now, pasting on the labels. She looked up with her grave, inquiring eyes in her aunt's face, dimly wondering whether it were possible that grim, hard face could ever have brought sunshine into any beaten-down, sad soul. Josline did not realize that what you bear hardly, whilst it tempers your soul, sharpens it also.

"I think Mr. Watt would always try to do what he thought his duty," she said, in her low, sweet voice.



“What girls think about young men is always better left unsaid,” returned Miss Barbara, in a tone that brought the scarlet colour flashing over Josline’s delicate face; and, although her head rose, with a kind of settling on her slender throat, she became absolutely silent.

Not so Gladys, who half rose, and then settled back on the window-seat with a little fiery jerk. “No, Miss Fairfax, please; I beg your pardon; but if you *know* a thing is true, you ought to say it about a person. I mean, it’s mean not to!”

This very well-constructed sentence caused Miss Barbara much amusement. She smiled sourly.

“My dear Miss Clinton, pray say anything you like about your cousin. I do not doubt him to be a very Minos of wisdom and justice.”

“He may not be clever, but he is good; and I know he will do everything in the world to be a good agent to Hermione.”

“He ought to, I am sure. Miss St. John is one of the few people I ever thought unspoilt by prosperity.”

It became at once patent to both Gladys and Josline, that Miss Barbara had taken a violent and really unreasonable liking for Hermione—unreasonable, from the fact that she knew little or nothing of her. Gladys wondered why, all the way home. Miss Barbara could not possibly have told her, had she even wished to render account. There was something in the stately grace of Hermione that drew Miss Fairfax to-

wards her, as certain parasitical plants are drawn towards other growths of a higher and nobler kind. The rigid old maid was inclined to adopt with fury any line of conduct entered into by Hermione, save and excepting reserving judgment on others. In the beginning of the acquaintance with Robert Watt, she had been nearly as strongly inclined to like him ; but a prescience of his growing attachment for Josline at once embittered and checked her kindly feeling. She was jealous and reserved and exacting, and the idea of being second in any one's affection to which in the first instance she had had a prior claim, was like a bitter draught that she would not accept. She held fiercely to what she thought was her due and just proportion, and was prepared to sacrifice even the actual little for the apparent all. Hers was a nature to be terribly outwitted in love, for she would never yield ; and in some kinds of affection, more especially that of the young for their elders, it is only in willingness to yield all that we retain the power over any. Poor Miss Barbara !

It had never entered within the circle of Hermione's thoughts that Miss Fairfax cared for her, or, indeed, even thought of her at all, unless she were actually present. And yet, I imagine, she had not been wholly unmoved by the curious unknown attraction of her mind and person for Josline's aunt. That day, when they had called and tried to induce Miss Barbara to allow her niece to come to the theatricals,



it had been apparent to her that their hostess was more inclined towards her than towards Lady Clinton, and it may have been this unacknowledged feeling which made her more keen in her insight into Miss Barbara's character, and led her to perceive at once the strain of justice, though it might be warped, which underlay the harsh manner of her refusal. There is no doubt that unconsciously we judge more leniently those who are swayed by us, however innocent we may be of actual liking on either side.

Miss Barbara had never known any one in the least resembling Hermione; she was a revelation to her of possible perfection in womanhood. Why such was the case, she did not trouble to divine. It was like some of her brother's violin-music, which moved her and shook her, and made her think tenderly, even when in one of her most irate moods. She was not inclined, indeed she had no opportunity, to care for any one out of her immediate home life, and would have been the first to acknowledge that, if there had been any question of liking or disliking, she would naturally have been most inclined towards Robert Watt, of whom she had heard more or less from boyhood. But in these matters inclination generally works without volition; and then, Robert Watt wanted her ewe lamb.

"Yes; Miss St. John is what I should like you to be," she said, after Gladys had left, and Josline was again at work on the damask napkins.

Josline looked up, and said, "I saw very little of Miss St. John. I thought she had a very beautiful face."

"I wasn't thinking of her face!" said Miss Barbara, shortly. "You've got your mother's face, and she was one of the most beautiful women of her day. I was thinking of her way of speaking and her manner and her carriage, generally."

Josline was silent. She had felt slightly awe-stricken by Hermione, ever after seeing her in her angel's dress; and yet, a silent sympathy drew her towards Miss St. John, and she was deeply grateful for Robert's appointment; for though it had taken him away, she knew it was wiser and happier for them both.

"That little Miss Clinton talks a great deal too openly of her cousin," said Miss Barbara. "I think she should be checked."

A sudden pang shot through Josline's heart. "She has known him all her life. He is just like her—brother!" she answered, with slight hesitation.

"Brother me with no such brotherhood!" said Miss Barbara, folding down a napkin with a heavy pressure. "He is just not her brother; and I do wonder Sir Philip allows them to go on in the way they do; so flighty!"

Again Josline was reduced to silence; but a cloud of anxiety and pain and an unknown feeling of longing swept through her heart. It was hard enough to

have said him nay, and bid him go and leave her ; but—if another stood ready ? The beautiful small head sank lower over those crossed stitches, whilst a cry of despair almost wrung the poor child's heart. What martyrdom can equal loving with all your strength and life, and yet putting it from you and denying it ?

“ You look pale now, child ; you had better go out for a little. Go down to Nan Partridge's, and tell her I should like her to keep me a brood of her young chickens, of the speckled hen.”

Josline arose and went. Along the sweet-smelling lanes, under the hedgerows, beneath bending branches of apple blossom and cherry and pear, she was wondering what Enderby was like. She knew there was a great river, that flowed either just outside the park, or within its boundaries. She had heard it was a quaint old place, with fine timber and splendid cedars. She wondered whether he would grow attached to it. Probably he would remain there for life. General Watt was to go in the autumn. Life was very long ; she was so young, and, of course, she must live to be very old—all Fairfaxes did ; her only chance was her mother's family. But she knew nothing of the Vava-sours ; she thought she would ask Dux, when they were quite alone, about them.

Nan was busy hanging out the clothes to dry, in the orchard plot. Her bright, fresh, happy face crimsoned with joy on seeing Josline, and she ran

hastily forward to undo the wicket-gate, and beg her to enter.

"It do seem a long time that I haven't seen you, young madam," she said, dusting a clothes-basket and inverting it with speed for Josline to sit on, seeming to divine, by instinct, that the girl was tired, though fatigue was a sensation unwitted of by her sturdy, healthy young nature. "But see now! you've come with the flowers," she continued, recklessly breaking off a superb branch of the blossom that chequered the grass with light and shade, and laying it, a dainty offering, in Josline's lap. "Tubal do hold by seeing you, and he said yesterday it was a Sabbath whensoever you came."

Josline smiled; the kindly words and the true warmth went home to her young tired mind. "I don't come very often, certainly," she answered.

"I've seen you pass times and again," went on Nan, volubly. "And you do look a'most tired, I must say; it's the spring-tide, I think?" she ended, slightly interrogatively.

"I dare say," answered Josline.

"All young things feel it so," said Nan. "Young birds and young lambs and young children."

She was hanging up more clothes now, and turned to say, "We miss young Mr. Watt most terrible, Miss Josline. He came round here most days; he was always fond of wandering, and he spoke so pleasantly always. We hopes as he is getting on comfortable?"

“Very, I believe; Miss Clinton came to-day, and she said so.”

“Ah! there was village talk about them, but I don’t believe none such. Tubal says to me, ‘Nan,’ says he, ‘don’t you go repeating them foolish tales; young folks must be like birds, and try their wings at flights o’ fancy.’”

Josline was silent, and just as Nan began again, alarmed at thinking she might have given offence, by speaking so lightly of her betters, she said, “What I came for Nan, was to ask whether you would keep a brood of the speckled hen for aunt Barbara?”

Nan was proudly delighted, for Miss Fairfax was a noted hen-wife, and that she should desire a brood of chickens was indeed high praise.

They went round to inspect the tiny downy things; and after a little talk of home affairs, Josline turned to go. Nan suddenly growing very red, and twisting her apron tightly round her hands, blurted out—

“Miss—Miss Josline, if so be the liberty were not too great, might I make bold to say, that I heard the young furrin gentleman had done a most purty picture of you, all as it might be a flower—is it true?”

“Yes,” said Josline, laughing. “Do you want to see it? it is rather pretty, really. Will you come up some time or other, and Mrs. Turgoose will tell me, and I’ll bring it out to you, if my uncle is busy.”

Nan was again most happy; and Josline went home, and all the way she thought of those few quaint

words : “ Young folks must be like birds, and try their wings at flights of fancy.” Was his a flight of fancy for her ? But, then ah ! no ; she thought of the clear open face, the bright, honest pleading eyes, the ring of entire truth in the manly, straightforward voice ; and she closed her eyes, feeling faint with longing and anguish.

## CHAPTER II.

AT the very time Josline was thinking of Robert, he was thinking of her. It was all very well to have sewn up the Eurydice portrait in wash-leather, with those huge stitches, but he could not sew her face out of his mind, nor forget the plaintive tones of her voice, bidding him go from her. His life now was as full and active as then it had been empty and idle, but he did not find that hard out-door walking took from him the power of thinking constantly of her. Indeed, now and again, the men had wondered at seeing a soft smile come on his grave face, after some stern speech or hearty adjuration to some one who was not working with a will; it had been caused by some gentle recollection of *her* address to a refractory pigeon perhaps, or a hasty appeal to the "person of the house." In the quiet evenings, too, when he was dozing over a game at piquet with Mrs. Match, or staring into the fire, he went over and over again that last scene in the den, when she had so decidedly said



him nay. More and more the young man puzzled over it, and as is sometimes the case in receding from a scene, so as time widened between them, he seemed to see and grasp, with far clearer vision and insight, that there must be some strong, overwhelming motive for her refusal. He divined, though he did not realize, that she loved him, and more and more the conviction deepened and strengthened. "And *wouldn't* I make her happy?" he thought to himself, driving his hands well home in his trousers pockets, and stretching his legs to the blaze. "There is absolutely nothing she mightn't do with me, or make of me." And this thought tended to make him cheery at times.

This afternoon he was going rapidly back to Enderby from the fallows—he was staying in the house at present, till the steward's house was repainted and furnished). His loose cap was swinging in his hand, his bright, fair hair was blown about his face, and he was whistling cheerily. "Why, if there isn't my lady!" he said, adopting the title given to Hermione by all her people. He stood still by a great elm to watch her.

She was standing at the head of a broad turf drive, between a double avenue of magnificent elms, feeding some tame fallow deer. The timid things were becoming uneasy at his approach, and she was trying to tempt them back to her from the short distance to which they had retreated. The wind was floating out



her dark dress and ruffling her hair, and her slight figure was drawn up steadily and firmly, and without movement of any kind. She was making a low call to win the deer.

Hermione's brave, true nature had recovered from the frightful shock of the accident, and the subsequent grief about Colonel Myddleton. She had faced the position, struggled with her disappointment, and in proportion as her frame recovered from the effects of the immersion, so her noble, unselfish nature recoiled from fruitless grieving or repining. She had always loved Colonel Myddleton. She acknowledged this to herself now, and she thought with unreasoning loyalty that she always should do so ; but let the loss, or rather the want of his presence, deaden her life, and cramp her energy ? No !

She did not look forward to any personal happiness, in the so-called acceptation of the word, but she determined to use the great gift of wealth and lands, that God had seen fit to endow her with, in striving to render others what she might have been ; to bring out the utmost resources of the estate, for the best practical good of her tenants.

There was something in the bright clear look in her face, as she stood in the wind this afternoon ; in the serene, quiet determination of the small well-cut mouth and chin ; that said much of a resolution that brought its own benediction and peace.

Hermione's was a rare nature, clear as crystal,

true as steel. When once she had made up her mind as to what was really best and right to do, she fearlessly, bravely, and therefore happily, pursued her way to her own appointed end. She did not intend to try and forget Colonel Myddleton ; that would have been a folly, beneath the subterfuge of which her soul would have scorned to seek refuge ; but she kept her thoughts in thrall, and when they wandered too persistently in one direction, she *forced* them off, by either going out riding or driving, or planning new walks, or devising some comfort for sick people, or some other equally practical and tangible means of alienating her mind from the groove she did not choose it to work too long in. To forget, she knew was impossible ; it only remained to control. He was her first thought in waking, her last in lying down to rest, but she strove not to allow herself to be enervated and lamed by this. Nor was she ; and if now and then the thought would come, how perfect life might have been in this beautiful home, with him to help her and advise her, she would, though sometimes with tears in her heart, try to feel and not only say it was best as it was.

There was difference supreme between her nature and Josline's. They both tried to do what they conscientiously believed right, and indeed the only thing to do ; but Hermione's stronger nature met and faced the difficulty, laid it, and bound it, whereas Josline's more timid character led her to try and

evade it, and yet to be always tampering with it. When Hermione was overcome of memory, it was like the conquering of a strong man armed, who succumbs only to rise again in renewed strength and vigour; whereas Josline was a bound captive, led willingly to the slaughter, having surrendered meekly to a martyrdom. Poor child! her fate was easily divined.

The small creatures were now standing close to Hermione, stretching their slender necks and beautiful, soft muzzles, and one was so near that she had laid a hand on its glossy head; when suddenly Jerks, who had been rabbit-hunting on his own account, came up at a double, and with one unanimous bound, the deer fled over the bracken and heathy ground, and disappeared down a distant glade.

"You bad child!" said Hermione, stooping to pat the terrier, that, covered with sand and with scraps of dead fern and burrs and prickles of gorse, sticking like a collar round his mischievous rough face, bounded and danced round her.

"How soon you have tamed the deer!" said Robert's voice, close to her, making her start, as he came forward from his elm tree shelter.

"Well, I don't know what you call tame," she said, laughing. "It takes about a quarter of an hour to induce them to approach me, and they don't like it, then."

"It's better than nothing, though," he answered, as they strolled towards the house, which, like most

very old places, lay in the hollow. "Why, when you first came here they would hardly remain in sight, and old Dumble said no one had ever been able to get anywhere near them."

"I don't believe any one had ever tried, except to terrify them," she said. "They are such beautiful little things; and then, you see, I wander about amongst the woods so much alone, that they begin to think I belong, somehow, to the trees and things, I suppose."

"Yes, I suppose so," he answered, rather absently. Then he said, suddenly, "Have you heard lately from Charteriss?"

"Yes; this morning I had a long letter from Gladys; she had been over to Old Court with Mr. Crosbie. It seems he thought Josline Fairfax not very well, and wanted Gladys to go and cheer her up."

"What did Gladys think about her?"

"Oh, she thought her very well, indeed, and growing so like the picture of Mistress Margaret; but, if you like I will show you the letter, it is in the bay chamber. Just like Gladys; she goes off entirely on one subject and mentions nothing else."

"I should like to see the letter, very much. Gladys might write to me, occasionally, I think."

"Why don't you write to her and tell her so?" said Hermione, with a smile. "One likes to know one's letters are valued, and perhaps she thinks, as you never write to her, you don't care to get letters."

"Ah! she's an odd little cat, I can tell you, Miss

St. John. She runs away with the funniest ideas about people."

"So it appears," answered Hermione, a trifle dryly. "She is a most loving, unselfish nature, and I only hope some day will find some one worthy of making her very happy."

"Oh, she is always happy," said Robert, recklessly, and not without a tinge of bitterness, thinking of his own failure in that line. "Everything makes her happy, little stupid things—the curl of a fern frond, the ripple of light under the water, the sunlight in a raindrop-prism; such absurd things—it makes me laugh," he added, with a short, hard laugh. "She was always like that from a very little child. I don't think anything very hard or sad would injure her, she has broken up all her feeling in such tiny sparks."

"There you are quite wrong, and only show supreme ignorance of human nature and the very highest and best nature," said Hermione, with quick decision, and yet not with the severity of intonation conveyed by the sense of the words. "Gladys is like a crystal—she reflects from every facet, a true and beautiful reflection; but once strike the centre facet, and you spar and shiver for ever the perfect iridescence of each separate surface."

Robert stopped walking, kicking a large pebble out of the soft sandy soil. "She is a dear, kind, loving child," he said, slowly, "but only a child; I have

known her all my life, and never saw any depth in her. Well, now I come to think of it, yes, last autumn she did say one or two rather startling things—a kind of flash or so.”

“It is because you have known her all your life, and never really thought about her character, that you think so lightly of it now,” said Hermione. “I have sometimes thought myself that that is one reason why those with whom we pass our daily and hourly lives know us really far less truly and actually at our best and deepest, than those who, by some passing but intense sympathy, draw out our most cherished convictions, our highest aspirations.”

“Now, that is a true thing you have said,” said Robert, giving the pebble a kick, which sent it flying widely, and thinking vividly of Josline. “You do hit on the cleverest and simplest things, Miss St. John. I know just the sort of persons you mean. One day, Gabriel was talking about sympathy and all that sort of thing, and he said it all depended on whether other people affected you morally or physically. Now, his wife affects him physically, I know, and Josline acts on his soul, and that’s why he can always paint best when he is thinking of her.”

In this very involved sentence, young Watt quite forgot that he was talking of Miss Fairfax in the most familiar manner, and without even the use of her surname.

Hermione smiled. “Well, have I convinced you about your cousin now?” she said.



Robert's thoughts were circling round Josline, and he nodded his head gravely, and said, "Oh, yes; there's no one like her."

Hermione looked up quickly, saw his abstracted look, and said, "I must show you the letter when we go in." And then she went on thinking to herself, how almost always our first affection, be we men or women, is unequally bestowed, either above or beneath our own merits. Why should this be? Why should not our hearts at once divine who would and could reciprocate their devotion, instead of wasting their first freshness, power, divinity in fact, on stray and unworthy recipients? Perhaps it was that all first affection is so truly and in its essence unselfish, that, did it meet with adequate return, it could not survive the perfection of attainment.

"When is Gabriel Vannier going down to Charteriss again?" she said, at last.

"Before very long, I think. He is going to paint Lady Clinton and Gladys in a group. He was to go down when he wanted a pause in the picture he is painting for me. I think that will come soon," he ended, significantly.

"Do you mean——?" she asked, hesitatingly.

"Yes; I mean that terrible wife will drive him down. Now, there is a wrecked and blasted life. He might have been anything, that fellow; and he is as good as gold; no, but really, so unselfish, so entirely devoted to his art."

"I should think his very goodness made her worse," said Hermione, gravely and slowly. "I can quite imagine that, do you know, the sort of hopelessness of ever getting back to be anything like him."

"But he is so patient, so good with her, you can't think."

"Ah! that is the very thing; if he got in a rage, she might feel there was a chance of meeting him on some ground, however high above her own."

"But you are bringing forward a most horrible doctrine!" he said, aghast. "At that rate, bad people ought to live with bad people, and *vice versa*! Just imagine the world!"

"No, not at all; but the wrong people ought to live with the right people," she said, smiling. "Now, if Viola Vannier had lived with you?"

"Oh!" he said, vehemently. "I couldn't stand her; I should have beaten her."

"There you have it! You are not a bad person at all, we know, and you would have been the right person with Viola. You would have beaten her; she would have had something to forgive you, as well as your having something to condone in her, and you might have met on mutual ground, I am sure. Some people are too good to live, or to live with; they bring out the worst, because the despair that creates revolt lurks in every human being. You feel often that certain people would have been quite different, if they had lived under different conditions."



"Yes, poor things! Well, I do pity her. She adores him for all that." Then he was silent; he was thinking that he had never talked over the case with Josline, and wishing he had done so.

"I will tell you something," said Hermione, quickly, turning away and looking down a distant glade. "Josline Fairfax is one of the impossible people; she is too good, too gentle, too unselfish, too *one*, ever to help another through life; she will live her own life perfectly, purely, truly; but she will live for one dominant idea, and I think—she has found it."

"And what do you think it is?" he said, in an odd, low voice, not looking at her either, but grasping his hands together so tightly that the veins sprang up in knots.

"Her mother's memory—and she was a Roman Catholic."

"Why do you think so?"

"It shows in every line of her face; but what really makes me think so is, that the last day we were at Old Court—you remember you were there, too?——" She paused.

He said, briefly, "Yes."

"Well, when we were driving away, I happened to look up at her window; she was sitting in the window, holding a crucifix"—(Robert gave a frightful start)—"looking at it. Oh!——" Hermione covered her eyes with her hands and paused.

"Go on!" he said, with breathless, stern insistence.

“ With such terrible, earnest, pressing agony, as I never saw in any young face in my life. I only saw her face for a second, it was pale as ashes, it looked like death, it made me feel quite faint, it was as though she had died, her very soul seemed pressing through her eyes, her mouth, her cheeks. I felt, any one would have felt in looking at that face, that she was—fulfilling a vow at the cost of her life.” Hermione’s voice sank to a whisper.

Robert grew very pale, and gave a low groan ; but he set his teeth hard, and he said in his heart, “ She does love me, then. Well, I will win her in spite of it.”

## CHAPTER III.

THEY came into the fine old hall, crossed the floor, which was tessellated in black and white marble, and went through the great door which led into the bay chamber. In this hall it was always sombre and cool, even in the very hottest summer days; deep shadows stood like draped statues in the lofty corners. Tall, narrow pictures, grim and black with age, hung in the panelling above antique cabinets, and tables with twisted legs of ebony or oak stood over huge jars from China and Japan, which emitted curious odours from the fissures in the golden-dragoned lids. The long narrow windows looked out on a grass lawn in front, taken in from the wildest parts of the old park, and the deer sometimes in the quiet, dewy evenings, came closely up to the house. The stately, lofty old hall ran straight up to the roof, where it ended in a domed ceiling, groined and fretted in oak.

The house was three storeys high, built of red brick, and with a creamy stone balustrade running

round at the top. The walls were of that beautiful, indescribable, rich tone so often assumed by old bricks ; yellow jessamine, pyrus japonica, guelder-roses, and many other clinging plants grew against them in abundance, and ran round the stone mullions. A narrow flower border circled the base of the house, in which grew, in their seasons, velvet-slippered sweet-williams, candytuft, hollyhocks, scarlet geraniums, violets, lilies of the valley, roses, and deep purple-bosomed pansies. There was no other flower-garden. The St. Johns had not been a flower-loving race. Behind the house, which was curiously built in three sides of a square, the ground sloped towards the river under some really magnificent old cedars, standing on velvet turf, so deep, so rich, so mossy that your every footprint left silvery shining trails of light behind you. In the evenings mystic shadows floated in purple splendour under the stately trees, and the sun's dying tones struck the earth and edged the moss and leaves with passionate tones. Silvery lights gleamed up from the river and shifted in tremulous waves of opal and pearl under the low, drooping, solemn boughs of the cedars. A little further on, and in the bends of the tide, you saw the reeds and water-plants trembling and quivering, shimmering and dripping, in the glow. A boat drifted past, perhaps, and you heard the rattle of the oars in the rowlocks ; and the swallows flew low.

It was a wonderfully beautiful, quiet, stately home,

and somehow Hermione seemed born to live in it, and to be the presiding spirit of the whole. There was an indefinable something in her tall figure, as she moved quietly and silently across the velvet lawn, or stood under the cedars, or leaned over the waters by the clumps of lilies that stood like silver flames against the dusky shadows in the water, that seemed to strike the key-note of the whole. It was that Hermione loved this place with a personal, living, deep affection; loved the grand old cedars, and the wild deer-park, and the loneliness. You felt she would be out of place with almost any other surroundings, and that this place would be incomplete without her. It was indeed lonely; the water that splashed ceaselessly against the broad marble steps below the lawn was the nearest roadway. The shortest approach was three miles long, through sweeping beech and oak woods. The nearest neighbour lived ten miles away. But Hermione did not mind—she liked it; she did not mean to lead a lonely life. When the estate was in better order, she intended asking her friends to come and stay with her, a good many at a time, “that they might be company for each other.” At present she rode about, looking over the new works, going over the cottages, getting to know all her out-lying tenants; and she had a splendid library, an organ, and portfolios full of exquisite engravings, which she was classifying and arranging.

As she opened the door of the bay chamber, a

little aged woman rose and came forward from behind the old Spanish screen. She was very small, dressed in deep mourning, and had a bright, sweet old face, giving one rather the idea of a fairy godmother in disguise. Hermione went up to her quickly, and laying a hand on each shoulder, she stooped down and kissed her forehead.

“ Well, Mrs. Match ! did you think I was lost ? ” she said, smiling. “ Do you know, I really was once, but this clever, dear little person,” pointing at Jerks, “ found the way again. I had been to see where they are thinning out the huge rhododendron beds, and had no idea how far off it was ; and then the deer seemed rather tamer to-day, and I was enticed into feeding them, and altogether—well, here I am, and I hope you are glad to see me ! ”

“ You know it, you know it, my dear, my lady,” said Mrs. Match, who never would speak of or to Hermione by any other title than the one “ she ought to have borne if she had only been a boy, or dear Mark had lived.”

Hermione had tried in vain to talk her out of it, and had at last yielded in despair. Mrs. Match adored Miss St. John with the entire devotion of her heart, with the strange and utter abnegation sometimes given by very small beings and animals to tall, stately people. There was only one place in the world, in her imagination—Enderby ; and only one “ my lady,” and that was Hermione. Windsor and

the Queen *might* come next, but they could not equal, far less surpass, those two Icons of Mrs. Match's devotion.

"Is the chocolate ready?" said Hermione, going up to an exquisite table of ivory and silver; and then turning to Robert, she added, "If you will sit down and have a cup, Mr. Watt, I will get you the letter."

"Now, am I doing right?" she wondered, as she went through into another room hung with tapestry, and out through the hall to a side door. She stood still for a moment, leaning her graceful head against the shutter of one of the deep windows. "I know it's no good; the poor child could never have looked like that and meant to accept him, and yet—it does seem cruel not to give him the letter—well! he must dree his weird, like the rest of us, I suppose; and then somehow, in the end, the right and the wrong people will get together respectively." She was silent even in thought; her grave, sweet eyes filled and brightened, and she smiled softly to herself. Perhaps one day *he* might find the right person, too. A thrill ran through all her delicate limbs in thinking that if only he could be happy, and through her, nothing would be too great to yield, no time too long to wait.

Robert had gone to the window. He and Mrs. Match were great friends. He had taken his cup of chocolate in the fragile jewelled china, and was stirring it vehemently round and round. "I say," he began, "I think she looks better than she did when



she first came, don't you ? And when Phil and Lady Clinton come, and my little cousin Gladys, you won't know her. I am sure you'll like them."

"I am sure I shall," acquiesced little Mrs. Match, who had never been known to dissent from anything in her life.

"And then, you know, that poor young artist I was telling you about.—I want him to come and stay with me in the summer. When my picture is finished he is going to bring it down here, and hang it for me, and then, don't you think we might get her to sit to him ; now don't you ?"

"Yes, oh, yes !"

"And then—not sit, you know, but stand. I'll tell you. Come here, do, and look." He put down his cup, after swallowing hastily the contents, and caught her arm and drew her to the window. "Now, don't you see ? she shall stand just under that great tree, and the lilies—they'll be fully out then, and she's awfully like them—shall lean up towards her ; and she shall wear a dark dress, and then her hair'll shine out awfully jolly, you know ! Oh ! I know all about it. Vannier said I had a regular good eye for an effect. And then we'll hang her in the banquetting-hall by poor Sir Mark ; he'd like that, and they can look at each other, you know, eh ?"

"Oh ! yes, yes !" said the fairy godmother.

At this moment the door opened, and the two guilty ones sprang apart and got very red.



“ You conspiring people ! ” said Hermione, laughing. “ What were you talking about ? ”

“ Ah ! ah ! ” said Robert. “ You’ll know in the summer.”

“ Well, I dare say it will keep,” she said, smiling and carelessly. “ There’s the letter, you’d better answer it for me. Gladys will be pleased, and I have all this to answer,” and she lifted a prodigious pile. “ I wonder if people really think I am made of money and time ? ”

“ Put them in the fire ; I would,” from Robert.

“ My dear, they will be so useful to line the grates in summer ! ” from Mrs. Match.

“ Horror ! ” said Hermione, shaking a pile of them at the little old lady. “ What ! and see them staring at me for months ? No ! I mean to read them, and then keep them to line old boxes with.”

“ Miss St. John ! ” said Robert, with a laugh.

“ Well ? ”

“ You don’t mean it ? ”

“ Well, I am not sure—there ! I opened an old trunk the other day, and it had a bill of George the First’s time in it, and really, it was very funny. I was quite grateful to the person who had stuck it in.”

“ You ought to keep a secretary,” said he. “ You will never be able to answer all that.”

“ I mean to, though. No, thank you ! If I had a secretary, I should never know what I was at ; and besides, I have nothing much to do, really ! ”

Robert and Mrs. Match looked at each other and smiled.

Robert had a certain awe for Hermione. He always thought of her rather as an enchanted princess ; and perhaps living in this lonely, quiet, stately house enhanced the idea. Then she always dressed in black, which added gravity and a certain etherealism to her pale face and tall figure, and she was remarkably silent and reserved in manner and expression ; and though treating her young agent with the utmost courtesy and kindness, still held him in a certain kind of bondage, by the very benignity and gentleness of her demeanour. In fact, he would as soon have thought of speaking to her openly, and on an equal footing, as of calling Dorothy anything but Lady Clinton. It was a curious fact, that every one of every degree always treated Hermione as though she were, in one way or another, of a higher grade than themselves ; and no less curious was it, that Hermione was fully aware of this. She felt it with every one, excepting Colonel Myddleton, and it may be that it a little influenced her behaviour towards others, though quite unwittingly to herself.

“ It will be nice, when we get straight here,” she said, “ and I can ask everybody. I should like to get the same party together we had at Charteriss. Just imagine the triumph, if I could induce the Fairfaxes to come ! ”

## CHAPTER IV.

MISS BARBARA had grown less loquacious of late, when Josline was with her. She was evidently meditating profoundly, probably on some such subject as the "person of the house's" frequent motherhood. It was always a grief to Miss Barbara when puss would appear with a kitten in her mouth, generally after an absence of some few days, and deposit it humbly and miauing at her liege lady's feet. If Miss Barbara remonstrated loudly, puss left her child, and fled; but, alas! only to reappear, with another addition to the family, and so on, and so on, till at last she sat cosily down, and appealed to Miss Barbara's heart by a miau of such abnegation and feline pathos, "that you could hear the creature saying, 'Of course, if I must, I must; but you wouldn't break my heart, and take them away!'" as Miss Barbara said, rubbing her black mittens together in hopeless irritation. "And why on earth cats must have kittens; it *is* so foolish, and wears them to death, and me, too." But this

time Mrs. Turgoose wronged her mistress ; it was not puss who was exercising her thoughts so deeply that she had actually put three black currant labels on the finest apricot jam.

Miss Barbara had a heart ; where exactly, or governed by what laws and rules, was never, and never will be, known now ; and her heart was uneasy. In vain she said to herself that she was foolish and fanciful. She caught herself starting at footfalls, because Josline's always quiet walk had gradually grown quieter and slower. It was enough to make any one restless to see a young girl so creep-mouse ! She caught herself listening for a short, little cough, and a catch in the breath afterwards. It was all the doves on the cold mornings ; they must have a house, and stop in it. A house was made ; but the doves circled and wheeled, and Josline stood watching them wistfully from the window, till Miss Barbara said, snappishly—

“What a glare ! Pull down the blind, Josline.”

Josline drew it down, and turned round into the room silently, without a murmur or word of any kind.

“Can't you do something, child ? Don't stand with your hands folded like that !”

Josline took up some work, and sat down with her back to the window.

“How can you see ? What nonsense ! Pull up the blind again. There's no need to keep the room in darkness and destroy your eyes !”

Obediently, Josline got up, and pulled up the blind.

“Come here! How badly you are doing those napkins! Give it to me! Now, undo it all again,” and with a rip Miss Barbara tore down the whole.

Josline took it back and sat down, with a slight quiver round her mouth only.

“Josline!” Josline looked up. There was a strange light in her aunt’s face and a strange ring in her voice. “Are you tired? Why don’t you speak? I consider it very disrespectful of you to make no answer to anything I say!”

“I will try and do it better, aunt Barbara.”

“So I hope, indeed! Lately your conduct has been most strange, so sulky and silent. If we can’t give you gay company, or routs and parties, you should not be cross about it. I am sure Dux and I do our best to make you happy!”

“Oh, yes!” said Josline, earnestly, but not looking up again.

“Then, I suppose, it’s that dreadful Vavasour temper of yours. Mr. Crosbie says you want to go away. I suppose you would like to go off with——”

Josline looked up again, with great dilated eyes. The passionate colour flew over her face, then ebbed like a tide, and left only two spots of flame in either cheek.

“Mr. Crosbie is very unkind,” she said, quick and low, like an audible pulse. “I am quite content.

Everybody is very good. I don't want anything." Her voice stopped ; the pulse ran down, as it were.

" Well, now command yourself ! I meant with Miss St. John, who was very kind to you, I am sure ! "

" I hardly saw anything of her ! "

" You needn't answer so pertly ! She was kind to you ; she spoke of you kindly. I wish you were more like her."

Josline was pale and quiet again, now. If she thought anything about Hermione, it was as the person who had benefitted Robert, by taking him from her.

Miss Barbara watched her a little time in silence ; and then, getting up, she went out of the room. Josline went quietly on with her work. She was in a day-dream, and far away. Her life seemed all dry and empty : a little brown husk, blown open by a sharp east wind, and deprived even of the small, soft kernel. If some warm, bright life could have come suddenly down on her, it might have warmed back into radiancy the fading spirit of the gentle girl ; but some lives seem only to be perfected in quiet suffering. The tableaux had been like a lightning flash of unknown possibilities of life and character, and pleasure and vivid strong emotion ; but the after events had dulled and dimmed them with a curious, half-horrible reality of suffering ; and Josline, thinking over that night now, generally shuddered a little, and thought of it as of some phantasm of life, not as



having actually been within her own existence. What she retained with pleasure was the memory of Gabriel's visit; the kindly dreamy and yet intense sympathy of his manner to her affected her in thought as the delicate perfume of some exotic. His whole tone of thought and desire was responsive to her highly strung nature, and, when with him she felt rested in mind and body. Being with him was like conscious dreaming; you were held by the silence in some manner. How often she found herself thinking over that conversation about the attraction of kindred natures!

Although Josline did not know Gabriel was married, it never struck her that he looked on her in any other light than that in which he regarded Gladys, or indeed, Miss Barbara. Few indeed would have been those who could have understood how the painter did think of her. To him she was the embodiment of his earliest, most holy, most perfect aspirations. With his instinctive finely poised nature, he divined, even before she did, that she loved Robert, and by the same power discovered that she would never consent to acknowledge it. Why, he could not know.

Often, working lonely in his studio amongst the chimneys, there came before him a vision of the quiet sunny garden of Old Court, with its quaint carved seat, its mossy turf, the circling doves, the slender figure of the young girl; and, like a voice in a dream, a kind of spirit-echo of violin music and the pathetic voice that

had once stirred the chords of his life to such emotion as to produce faintness. He would let his brush rest mid-air, half close his eyes, and strive to see more plainly even the expression of her face. It was wonderful how like Josline his Virgin was growing. It was true that he had studied her face deeply during the tableaux, and had seen her much moved, and, also, that he possessed several slight sketches of her head in various attitudes ; but nothing short of the kind of possession in which his soul held hers could have enabled him to render her as he was doing. He longed, and yet dreaded, finishing it. When he laid aside his brush in completion, he felt a conviction that life, too, would end for him. He well knew that he was living on his life, so to speak, using up at a frightful rate the small remains of his strength, and in a way he husbanded every movement and breath.

Robert had written to him several times, describing Enderby, and saying how much he wished him to come down when his painting permitted, and when the weather should be warmer ; telling him all about the steward's house, with its long, low drawing-room, with the soft, clear north light in it, and describing to him where he hoped to hang the picture, when finished, in an alcove facing the light on the line of sight.

Something in the descriptions of the wild park, the cedars, the river, drew the artist by a kind of weird spell, and a great yearning came down on him



to go to Enderby and see it all. He wrote to Robert, saying he should like to go, but would wait till the picture was further advanced; and he could come down and choose where it should hang. And meanwhile he worked and worked at it, and day by day it grew in beauty and expression.

Hermione had also begged him to visit her during the evening at Charteriss; and he, much struck by her whole bearing and manner, had cordially responded to the invitation. Now he knew that Robert was living there, the plan seemed more feasible.

But this is a long digression, and we must return to Old Court.

Miss Barbara crossed the hall and went into her brother's room. He was settling some canzonets as usual. She went to the window, closed it, and then, coming back, she perched herself on a high stool by a writing-table.

“Dux!”

It was a voice of warning of great events to come, and Mr. Fairfax, with a sigh, laid down the canzonets, and, taking up his violin, proceeded to re-string it with the tenderness of a young mother over a month-old infant.

“Have you noticed anything amiss with Josline, these last few months?” said Miss Barbara, shortly.

“As men only see what they look at, I suppose not.”

“I often look at Josline,” answered Mr. Fairfax,

casting a side glance at the lily's heart. "I have thought her rather delicate and pale-looking."

"That's not at all the fact, then," said Miss Barbara, fiercely. "She looks better than I ever saw her in my life. What a colour! quite a flame! It would be vulgar in most girls. But you know very well if your eyes were not accustomed to violin varnish and——"

"Barbara, violins are not varnished!"

"And nothing else," said Miss Barbara, driving her words straight on, like charging cavalry; "that Josline ought not to have any colour; you know what Vavasour colour is—it goes with the temper, a sourness in the blood."

"I am sure the child is most sweet-tempered, Barbara, and more and more so; I can't get her to take an interest in anything; unless I ask her to do a thing, she doesn't seem to care for anything, and if I ask her the most contradictory things, she is always as gentle about it as possible."

"Of course, there you have it. She is so good and gentle she makes me quite angry; nothing is so aggravating as a chit of a child who will agree to everything, whether she can possibly like it or not; it is excessively bad for one's temper. Now this morning I tried her. I made her pull the blind up and down at least three times. By-the-by, Tubal must come and look at it, it sticks so, all his work now is so unsatisfactory; I would try the other smith, but

he drinks and beats his wife, and doesn't touch his hair when I pass. Well, I couldn't make her say anything; she flamed up a little when I said Mr. Crosbie thought she wanted to go away. Now what do you think?"

"I think the child loves us," said Mr. Fairfax, slowly. "She tries her utmost to do all we wish, but I think she pines for young things and young life. I think we must send her away."

"Send her away!" echoed Miss Barbara, breathless. "Dux, you wouldn't be so wicked! Send her away! and who to?—just now, when she is forming her character and all, at the most critical point of her life, to grow like that little Miss Clinton, whom I don't like at all; so flighty!" (Did Miss Barbara dimly understand that Gladys was an unconscious rival of her Josline's?) "And then this house, without the child! And just because she is quiet and good! Really, Dux, men never understand anything. I wish I hadn't spoken to you."

"I only meant if she liked to go for a little change," said Mr. Fairfax, holding his thin hand up to his head as the rough words whirled round and round him. "I dare say she will refuse and not want to go, and, indeed, where could we send her? Perhaps to Lady Dunstable?"

"Dux, I will not hear of it!" said Miss Barbara, with such energy that the stool tipped up and nearly threw her forwards. "To that wicked old French woman!"

"She loved her mother, though."

"Yes, I dare say, because the young foolish thing went over to the Pope of Rome. I don't believe he cared a bit, though they said he was so pleased and sent her his blessing. Pah!"

"You must not speak evil of dignitaries, Barbara," said her brother, with a quiet twinkling smile.

"Will you dare to defend him, Dux?" said Miss Barbara, her eyes nearly jumping out of her head.

"He is a harmless old man, I believe."

"That is more than you are, then," retorted Miss Fairfax, grinding her hands together (rubbing is too mild a term) behind her back. "You are capable of talking all this nonsense to Josline, and telling her he was good to her mother, ugh! and she is capable of loving him for it; and I'll tell you what, Dux, it strikes me that that falling away of her mother had more in it than you think, and that it weighs on the child now, and some day, if you don't look out, we shall have a priest poking in here, and then don't say I didn't tell you so. What with the Pope of Rome and the red Buonaparte man, life is dreadful!"

"Well, Lady Dunstable hasn't asked her, and I don't think she wants to go anywhere. I know Crosbie thinks so, but it's only an idea; so let us wait a little and see."

## CHAPTER V.

It was a bright, fresh morning. Sir Philip stood at the breakfast-room window, whistling cheerily, with his hands in his pockets, whilst on each side of him sat a large setter, with anxious eyes fixed on his face. Disko, on the back of a very high chair, sat chattering volubly and shaking a miniature fist at the dogs, who paid not the slightest attention to these warlike demonstrations.

“I say, Dorothy, do come and look at these jolly little fellows popping in and out of the fern! It’s an awful pity one is obliged to shoot the poor little beggars. Hie! there goes one bounding clean up in the air!”

The dogs gave a faint yelp at his exclamation, and Disko a little yell. But Lady Clinton’s thoughts were far removed from rabbits; she was intently reading a long letter, and Gladys was smiling over hers with a comical air.

“I say! I do wish women wouldn’t——”

He was stopped by a simultaneous shriek from Lady Clinton and Gladys, which made him turn round, and they both began at once. "Well! really——" "Oh, Phil! how delightful!"

"What is the matter?" he said, advancing to his wife, who jumped up and said—

"Colonel Myddleton is back in England."

"Why, you might have seen that by the postmark and stamp, at once!"

"So I might, only I saw the foreign paper and never thought about it. Well, but——"

"Now, Phil, do listen to me," said Gladys, springing up and dancing wildly about. "Who *do* you think is going to be married?"

"Oh, who?" said Lady Clinton, eagerly, with the natural feminine curiosity on the subject.

"Duke Myddleton!" said Sir Philip, not unwilling to prove a thunderbolt in turn. "Gladys, if you skurry round and round like that your hair will come off!"

"Colonel Myddleton!" said his wife aghast.

"Well, why not? Who so likely, I should think? He's a thundering good fellow, and she's a lucky woman whoever has got him."

"It isn't Colonel Myddleton, though, all the same," said Gladys, still gyrating. "And you'll never guess unless I tell you."

"Really, Gladys, you ought to have been an Irish-woman," said Sir Philip, laughing.



“Let us look at the handwriting of her letter,” cried Dorothy, with quick womanly instinct, and she pounced on the envelope. “Why, it’s Mina Thorold. How uninteresting!”

“It isn’t uninteresting; it’s Mina herself!”

“No! Who to? Not Robert, surely?”

Gladys stopped twirling, sobered as though by a blow. “Robert!” with supreme scorn. “She isn’t good enough for *him*.”

“Well, I don’t care,” petulantly from her sister-in-law. “She is a pert little thing, and I don’t care who she marries.”

“Yes, you will! Well, Sir Vere Temple!”

“What nonsense!” from Dorothy.

Sir Philip burst into a peal of laughter.

“Well, you know she’s very pretty,” said Gladys, demurely.

“She! I wasn’t thinking of that. Why, you might as well have married him! He’s twenty years older than Phil,” and Lady Clinton drew her husband’s face down sideways and kissed him.

“Well, she is so pleased; read her letter. I thought she liked him when I was staying with them. Sir Vere is going to have her painted by Gabriel Vannier.”

“Oh, I’m glad of that,” said Sir Philip.

“Yes, and how pleased Bob will be!”

“Well, I don’t know,” said Lady Clinton, thoughtfully. “I don’t think Gabriel ought to waste his

time painting people. He is not strong, and ought to reserve his energies for original pictures. By-the-by, didn't you ask him down here, Phil ? ”

“ Yes, to paint you two,” said her husband. “ And, strong or not strong, I hope he'll do that.”

“ He was to write and say, wasn't he, when he could come ? ”

“ Yes ; but if he doesn't write soon I shall write and ask him, He is a shy fellow. I fully expect he'll nearly live down at Old Court. But go on, Gladys, and tell us the whole thing.”

“ Well, they're to be married soon, and old Lady Dunstable doesn't quite like it ; so Mina has been in hysterics, and now it's all settled.”

“ Well, it's really rather funny. Just fancy that pink-and-white little girl marrying old Vere ! ”

“ I call it rather horrid,” said Lady Clinton. “ She is so young ! I don't wonder dear old Lady Dunstable does not like it.”

“ Oh, it's a fair exchange—a title and money. She gets one and he the other.”

“ Now, Phil, do not talk like that ; you know you have a horror of anything of the kind ! ”

Sir Philip lifted Disko to his shoulder and answered slyly, “ Well, Dorothy, I don't think even a Dresden china tea-cup looks as well without a handle as with one, and we all like, or did when we were small, gilt ginger-bread.”

“ Sir Vere really is rather like ginger-bread,”



said Gladys, laughing. "He has a tough, brown face."

"It's too serious to laugh about," observed Dorothy, in a grieved voice. "I really like Sir Vere, and she is not a bad little thing in her way, and yet I am sure they will not be happy together."

"Now I think they will suit each other capitally, my dear. They both like comfortable, lounging chairs, and devilled kidneys, and champagne, and—and——"

"Phil, do not go on like that!"

"Well, it's highly necessary to have the same tastes when you live together, and I am quite sure if people considered each other's palates more than they do, when they are choosing a companion for life, there would be fewer 'incompatibility of temper' cases. Now you know, Dorothy," he said, with comic gravity, seizing her unwilling hands, "you know when I am—we won't say cross, because my temper is really sublime; but when we have not had a good day's hunting, and come in tired and wet and very late, you let me have a Welsh rare-bit and some mulled ale and then a weed, why, I am like an arch-cherub."

"You are so absurd," said Dorothy, laughing and struggling.

"Yes; but if you didn't! Why, it's a melancholy fact that when I can't get what I like to eat I am rather—queer! And suppose you didn't like toasted

cheese, couldn't stand the smell etc., etc. Why, I think I should sue for a—— ”

“Hush ! ” said Dorothy. “ I won't have you joke about anything so horrid.”

“ We've been too near it once or twice, haven't we ? ” he said, teasingly. “ Well, don't you see, women really should consider more what tastes their future husbands are likely to have ; because, you know, if you can't stand red herrings and fried onions, why, don't marry Tom Jones.”

“ You're a goose ! ” was Dorothy's illogical rejoinder.

“ Well, we know the old proverb about that bird,” he said, sententiously ; “ and it is a fitting tag to my words of wisdom. And now I must be off after the poor bunnies.”

He called to his dogs and left the room with a resounding bang of the door.

Lady Clinton walked thoughtfully to the window, twisting Colonel Myddleton's letter round and round in her fingers. “ I wonder whether Robert will be sorry he has missed his chance now ? ” she said, musingly.

“ What, about Mina ? Oh, no, she always bored him ; she is so small and dainty and ridiculous,” answered Gladys, superbly.

“ You funny child,” said Lady Clinton, laughing. “ She is very nearly as tall as you are ; and, besides, Bob can't expect a woman as tall as himself.”

"I think he has made up his mind about the right height," said Gladys, blushing.

"You mean Josline?" asked Dorothy, curiously. "Well, but why on earth, then, didn't he speak? And I don't quite like it, either. I am sure she is very delicate, and, besides, she ought to do better than marry dear old Bob, good and nice as he is. He won't have a penny, and the Fairfaxes are excessively proud and high."

Gladys coloured furiously to her very eyelids, but said nothing, and her sister-in-law went on—

"It's all very well, but that dreadful old father was a nobody, and though his mother was everything one could wish, I expect the Fairfaxes would not care at all about the connection."

"Really, Dorothy!" burst out Gladys. "How you can say such things! It's quite disgusting!"

"But, unluckily, I am afraid the Fairfaxes will say them, too," persisted Lady Clinton. "I know Hermione thought something of the kind, and I believe that's one reason she asked Bob to go away with her."

Gladys's eyes filled with tears and her face fell, for she had great faith in Miss St. John's wisdom. "Oh, Dorothy, it would be too cruel, if they loved each other," she said; "and how could they ask him to Old Court so often, if they wouldn't allow it?"

"Because, dear, old people are always doing those stupid things," answered Dorothy, nodding her head

sagely. "And didn't you notice that lately Miss Barbara had grown very short in her behaviour to Robert, and that he hardly ever went there?"

"Yes," said Gladys, sorrowfully, as the last conversation about her cousin flashed across her.

"Well, I suppose they had begun to be afraid of something."

Gladys took up Mina's letter, and ruffling it together, she said, passionately, "Sir Vere has hardly anything either, but just because he is Sir Vere—oh, Dorothy, it is *disgusting*?"

"Well, don't vex yourself about it, dearest. I don't think it matters in reality, for I don't think Josline cares herself."

"I was just wondering," said Gladys, slowly, smoothing out the letter again. "Is that why she is not strong, do you think, perhaps?"

"No; I think Mr. Crosbie is most unnecessarily alarmed about her, and, sweet and gentle as she is, I have never seen so apparently unmoved a nature. I don't think she has very much or very deep feeling."

"Then she couldn't make Bob happy," said Gladys, shortly.

"Do you think he really cares, Gladys?"

"Well, he seems to," she answered a little reluctantly and then, fearing more questions, she took up her letter and Disko, and went out of the room.

Lady Clinton looked after her for some little time in silence, meditating. "It is really very curious,"

she thought. "Here is Bob between three heiresses. Well, at least, Mina wasn't an heiress exactly, and is now done with; but Josline Fairfax will of course have that lovely old place and whatever her uncle has. I don't suppose it's much, though; and then, supposing we have no children, Gladys will be extremely rich, at least, her children would, and then——" A little pale, Lady Clinton remained leaning up against the window, with her face sunk in her hand. "No; I am quite sure Phil would never consent to anything of the kind. What a mercy he is gone away! He's all very well, but, really——"

A gun, fired close to the house, startled her, and she walked slowly out of the room.

## CHAPTER VI.

HERMIONE was standing on the steps in her riding-habit, having just come in from a long and hard afternoon's ride. Jerks was lying by her side, panting, with his tongue out, and two fine colleys were also reposing on the lawn. She was feeding her horse with apples, and talking to old Mrs. Match, who, at a safe distance from the equine creature, stood holding Hermione's whip. The butler came up with some letters, which she took carelessly, and she smiled to see a very thick one for Robert from Gladys. How little she knew what was in it! Presently she sent the horses away, and went in, laying Robert's letter where he would be sure to see it the first thing.

She had gathered some marsh plants and a general handful of weeds from the waste lands she had been riding over; and now, in her habit, whilst waiting for the chocolate, she began arranging them in tall Venetian glasses.

Presently Robert came into the hall. She heard

him go and take up his letter, and then in a few minutes burst into a peal of laughter so loud and merry that when he opened the door of the bay chamber and came in, he found her smiling from contagious mirth.

“Well, what is it?” she said, looking up.

“Why, that little Miss Thorold is going to marry old Sir Vere, and Lady Clinton thinks I may be very sorry!” he said, going on reading as he walked up to the table. “That is a good joke! Why, I never cared a pin about her. I am very glad, I hope she’ll be happy, but I think he is a cantankerous old fellow,” he added, as sundry reminiscences of being severely snubbed by Sir Vere came rather unpleasantly to his memory. “However, I dare say she will get round him easily enough.” Then he read on a little. “Gabriel Vannier has written, saying he can go down now and paint them, and they are expecting him when she writes. I wish to goodness I could——” He stopped abruptly and coloured scarlet, recollecting that he was “under orders” now.

Hermione did not appear to see his confusion, but said, hastily, “Why should you not go over to Charteriss, too, and see how he is? and then, perhaps, you could induce him to come on here by-and-by.”

“You are very kind indeed,” he said hastily; “but, indeed, I couldn’t leave here now; there is too much going on. However, perhaps towards the end of his time I might go over, and bring him back here.”



"Yes, that would be very nice. Poor thing! I am sure he must want a long rest."

"Here's more news!" said Robert, reading on. "Colonel Myddleton has come back to England, and is going down to stay at Charteriss; and Quarl writes to say he has returned to meet some mysterious person, who is coming from India soon; that he got a long letter from India, at Cannes, evidently in a woman's handwriting, on deep, black-edged paper; and in a very agitated manner"—now that's Quarl all over! I don't believe Myddleton would ever be agitated, or show it if he were—"said he must return to England at once, and left by the night express." Gladys says they are all most excited, and Sir Philip says, of course it's his wife, and that's why he has never married. That's just like Philip! he's as Irish as Gladys, and he is always laughing at her."

Robert had rattled on with his letter and his reflections, not noticing Hermione.

It had been a great shock to her. Indeed, at first she did not even realize the full purport of what he was reading, after the first few words about Colonel Myddleton. Her face was as white as the tea-cup which she put down with the utmost care, to avoid the rattle she knew would otherwise be caused by her trembling hand. Of course she had always known this must come. When are we unprepared for any circumstance? But yet it had been cruelly sudden. This very day, by a curious coincidence, her

thoughts had been more than usually full of Charteriss, and the autumn. She sat down, and said in a low voice, "Is there any more? It seems to me all very much founded on Mr. Freeman's surmises!"

Her heart clung with desperate faith to her love, and she knew that if this news were true, she must root it out, though it should kill her.

"Gladys says Lady Clinton doesn't believe it; she says she knows Colonel Myddleton had some property in India, and probably the letter was on that account. However," concluded Robert, carelessly, "we shall soon know, for as he is going down to Charteriss, they will soon find out, and then Gladys is certain to write and tell me at once. Here's a lot more news. Ruby has been shot; she got kicked so badly, out exercising, they had to kill her. What an awful bore! How savage Phil will be! They have been cleaning out the 'head,' too, and such monstrous carp have never been seen, apparently. Nan Partridge has got a baby, and Miss Josline Fairfax is going to be godmother; she offered, it seems, and they were delighted."

By this time Hermione had got to the door. "I must go and change my habit," she said; "it has got so coated with mud."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Robert, crumpling up his letter, and going hastily to open the door for her; but she was too quick for him, the door had opened and closed before he reached it, and, a little discomfited, he returned to finish his epistle.

But Hermione did not go to her room; she felt as though the air in the lofty hall stifled and oppressed her. She went across it hastily, opened the door, closed it quietly, and lifting her habit over her arm, went slowly down the approach, and out to the wild deer-park; away, away. She wanted room, air, quiet, to still this pain, which was slowly eating into her heart and brain. Once or twice she wrung her hands hard in impotent misery; and yet she believed in him—with a strange, blind, unreasoning faith, she believed in him—though the tears ran down her pale cheeks, though now and then the choking sobs shook her slight figure from head to foot, or strangled in her throat, still she believed in him. “God knows, you are the only woman I love on earth,” rang back and back again to her, dully and without much sense in the echo, and yet still with a force and fervour that drove home conviction to her mind and heart. And yet he had spoken of being bound too, bound by his word of honour to another. What could it all mean? Of course there was nothing for it but to wait and see what time would unravel.

She went on slowly, turning off the approach and wandering away amidst the springing fern, and under drooping, feathery birch trees to the uplands. Against the sky a group of deer stood inquiringly, but so absorbed in thought was she that she passed them with her eyes fixed before her, and hardly noticed them; and there was something so gliding and so

quiet in her walk that though they half bent ready for flight, they did not actually fly.

Her habit was so heavy, especially dragging through the fern and brambles, that she took it at last in both hands, clasping her fingers under its long folds. In doing so she felt her diamond ring, and at once she thought again of the rainy evening in the tea-room at Charteriss, his beginning to speak, and then seeing the ring. It was dear to her now by the very memory, and she kissed it. After all, he was back in England, might at this moment be at Charteriss; she might see him before so very long. Perhaps, after all, it was only on business that he was coming. Mr. Freeman had always theories about people, and she didn't think he liked Colonel Myddleton. Yet still, with an aching beat, her heart returned again and again to the thought of the "woman's handwriting." Supposing he had got himself entangled in some way in India; she had heard vaguely of such things. Some one had doubtless appealed to his kindness and nobleness of heart; and now he did not think it possible to withdraw with honour. If only she knew all—the real, actual truth—she fancied she would not mind so much. It was this kind of guessing in the dark that worried and tortured her so.

A cold, small wind was whistling towards her; the sky was grey, and life looked flat, dead level, a monotony. She stood still, the wind shrilled over the dying bracken and young springing fronds at her feet,

and somehow a voice seemed to come from far away, saying: "Believe me, believe me!" She was so moved that she said in a whisper: "I do; I will."

For years afterwards she remembered that walk; the little bits of wool tangled in the small thistles; the budding may-trees, so twisted and gnarled and silvered here and there with lichens; the short, stubbly, dead-looking blades of ribbon-like grass piercing the fern here and there; the sprays of broken branches, empty snail-shells, little broken nutshells; the bounding away of the deer at intervals; the sudden switching of the birch sprigs in her face now and then; she, a lonely figure, going slowly towards the sunset, with that dumb anguish in her heart, and that strong, underlying faith in her soul. She was praying all the time, though she hardly knew it, I think, and she knew that he was to be trusted, that what he was doing was right, no matter what the bitter cost might be.

The clouds were behind her; the sky was pearling in the west, the small wind died down, and a quietude fell over the land for the evening. She turned round again and went peacefully home, and her heart trusted.

## CHAPTER VII.

IN the long gallery at Charteriss, Gabriel Vannier was painting; just working in a touch here and there, in the picture he had in hand of Lady Clinton and Gladys. How Robert would have delighted in the black hood drawn round the girl's fair face! He had written to Gabriel suggesting it, and Gabriel had quite seized the idea. The two figures were sitting at the end of the terrace, on the stone seat. Disko was playing by them, with scarlet and gold dahlia buds. At this moment, the monkey was in reality curled in a big chair, fast asleep, and, after a little, the painter drew his hand across his damp, cold forehead, and laid down his brush, walking back a little to see the effect of his work.

"My very sight is going," he muttered. "It won't be long now, but this must be finished, and my own picture, and then, I'll see Enderby, perhaps."

He was stopped by a fit of coughing, and after pausing to get breath again, he felt such longing for



air, that he laid down his palette, and mahl-stick, and drawing a covering over the picture, he went out.

The clang of the gallery-door awoke Disko, who sat up, much hurt and chattering with dismay, at being left alone. For a few seconds the small brown thing was quiet, looking around, then his glittering eyes fell on the covered picture. With a grimace he bounded out of his chair, and cautiously extended one paw of inquiry ; just as he touched the curtain he withdrew it, and leaping on the top of the easel, from that coign of vantage he tried to peer down between the covering and the canvas. No, he couldn't see. With a slight chuckle, he gave a sudden wrench, and dragged the picture and curtain down on the floor. He was so terrified, that with a yell he fled behind the big chair, and huddled himself into a small black ball, all paws and teeth.

No one came to beat him, though ; the mysterious covered thing on the ground didn't move, and the caught-up end of the cover showed a brilliant patch of scarlet. With many heart-beatings and chuckles and grimaces, he at length ventured out again, possessing himself of the mahl-stick, and wielding it as he had seen Gabriel do. Then he peeped and saw—a monkey ! a real monkey, disporting itself with dahlia buds ! Chattering, he extended a paw ; it was all “flat, stale, and unprofitable ;” he slapped it, no response. Having tried every means to make the pictured monkey get up and make friends, he finally



got in a rage, and *fought it*; he beat and tore the canvas, and then sulkily retired, with the covering wrapt round him, and creeping into a remote window-seat, fell asleep again, leaving the wrecks of the picture to protest in vain.

This puerile act of the small monkey cost a man's life.

The painter went on his way, little heeding that the glass of his life was being seized and shaken by the little animal he had forgotten to return to its keeper. He left the grounds, pursuing very much the track taken by Lady Clinton, the day she drove Hermione out for the first time after her recovery, but, going by the route they ended with, he found himself in the pine wood, his feet sinking in the sandy soil or crushing the fragrant pine needles.

It was an utterly beautiful day—soft, brilliant, and hot, with here and there a white cloud in the sky, round and shadowless. The air seemed full of spirit life; a soothing calm floated down on Gabriel's tired heart, and with a sigh, he sank on the roots of a gigantic uprooted fir, and lay full stretched, and half dreaming.

He closed his eyes and imagined the ærial forms of his brain floating before him, embodied. Here, in the sombre shadow of the trees, still, motionless, enwrapt from being and life, it might be so.

It was too exquisite a day to think; the very fact of existence became a shadow, unreal, intangible. He

hardly lived ; his spirit alone floated from its mortal coil, and expanded into vivid life and motion.

He was thinking of his picture, his beautiful, all-but-completed Madonna. He had worked early and late, he had lived in and for it ; and he snatched a few hours every now and then, as at present, trying to nerve himself to own its completion, and part with it, by the process of passing such time alone, unwatched, and steeped in the beautiful in nature.

He is very much changed ; more wan, more gaunt, more statuesque than ever he looks, lying back there with his parted lips, his half-closed eyes, and his two thin white hands tangled in his hair.

He is thinking of his picture now. How shall he tear himself from it ? or, rather, how shall he rend it from him ? He loves it—not with the simple love every creator has for his work, as such ; but blindly, adoringly, he loves this picture. So firmly is its outline impressed on the retinæ of his mental vision, that lying here now he yet sees it distinctly before him—the sweet oval face, so pure in its outline, so exquisite in its purity.

More and more, so thinking, it shone on him with the likeness to Josline. Perhaps this was the unacknowledged reason why he was so loth to part from it.

Josline was precious to Gabriel. He loved her with something of the same feeling he gave his art ; he was grateful to her for embodying his dreams. He loved her, not in truth equally with his art, for, to the true

artist, nothing living, existent, can absorb him totally from the ideal—but Josline, with her ethereal form and colouring, was not far from the ideal; something so pure, so sweet, so divine, there was about her, that Gabriel could not fail to find in her the outward expression of his earliest and holiest day-dreams. She lost only by being embodied. Had he but dreamed of her, she would have been his ideal, but the very fact of her existence proved to him that there existed somewhat higher still, more perfect in outline, more pure in completion.

It was the old, old sorrow; the eternal striving of the soul after beauty which is unearthly, unattainable.

Gabriel's was a nature sensuous and passionate, as that of all true artists must ever be, in combination with intense spiritualized refinement of thought and life. Every nerve and chord of his being was wrought to treble pitch by suffering and aspiring. He received into his soul the essence of everything good and beautiful of its kind, as only natures such as he was endowed with are capable of doing; and whilst he fed his higher life with this subtle and exhausting food, he neglected in ratio all commoner aliment. Of course, he suffered; every nerve jarred at times; the disease to which he was constitutionally liable gained strength almost hourly; tones, looks, were agony to him, which would have been allowed to pass unheeded by other commoner and grosser natures. He often passed hours of exhaustion, mental and physical; he

fought through lonely times of depression and disgust at his own shortcomings in art. He was never satisfied, never rested ; day by day the wistful, eager strain of mind and soul went on, with how little compensation !

Yet there was an answer coming with speed, fire-footed, winged, crowned.

A wonderful and rare combination, he was, of genius, fire, and power—too wonderful for ordinary men to understand in the very least degree. Who shall declare whether such natures are blessed or no ? Their Maker only can understand and handle souls of this stamp, for they possess no mortal equal.

A kind of undertone of mournful sound went through the great trees ; it could not have been wind, there was no breath stirring. It seemed to Gabriel like the chord of an organ, being held and pressed softly. His spirit seemed to rise on it and pulse along it. His thoughts reverted to his early life, his mother, his wife ; he thought tenderly of the latter, with gratitude. Had she not withheld herself entirely from the temptation, to please him ? Had she not refrained from entering the studio latterly, during his long, fasting vigils over the picture ? Ay, and he loved her for so doing. She was now alone in London. She had been glad he should go down into the country for change and rest ; she had never murmured at the dreary life, the monotony of her existence ; she had not pined to come with him. They

had stood together, and admired the picture; he had pointed out to her the small lights, the dim transparency of shade, the little curls and turns of the robe, the delicate veining of the skin; all—all his favourite, most tender thoughts and feelings about the picture, and she had entered into all; and he thought now that when it was quite finished, he would take her away to Italy, back to her sunny home-land, for a few glad months of rest and change, and that then, perhaps, they might begin life afresh.

## CHAPTER VIII.

JOSLINE was at the smithy, holding her godchild and having a talk with Nan. The little baby slept peacefully, and the happy mother, in looking at it, shrank no more from the sound of merry children's voices down the road and in the next cottage gardens.

Presently the child awoke; first its eyes opened widely, blue, dim, swimming in dreamy, beautiful, far-away repose. Then it smiled, and light came into the starry orbs; then with a small chuckling sound it put one hand up to the girl's hair, which yet it failed to reach.

Nan stood gazing in adoring silence. Josline lifted it from her knees and held it up, smiling and satisfied, against the light. The tremulous sunshine struck them both, and they made an exquisite group; the child stretching its tiny hands towards the backward thrown head. At this moment Gabriel came up the lane and saw them. He stood still; his look of dreamy absorption gave place to one of keen delight.

“My Virgin!” he muttered, then looked on.

The little creature was making springs now, and crowing faintly. Josline’s slender arms, at full stretch, held the slight burden from her, and a quiet, gentle, loving look seemed to brood on her young face.

At this moment there was a distant thunder-roll, and she started and turned her head. In so doing she saw Gabriel. She had not yet seen him since he had come down to Charteriss, and her whole face and manner altered instantly with a kind of wistful joy, for it brought the thought of Robert vividly to her. Giving Nan the baby, she got up and went quickly out of the porch where she had been sitting. The young artist advanced, smiling to greet her.

“Ah, Miss Fairfax!” he said, “you are just what I wanted to see. How is it that you have not been up to Charteriss? I know I ought to have come down to you, but this heat—and painting——”

“I am so glad to see you,” she answered. “The heat has been frightful. I, too, have been hardly out of the village, but I want very much to see how the picture is getting on. Mrs. Turgoose went up the other day, and says it’s wonderful; and Mr. Crosbie thinks so, too.”

“I think it will end well,” he answered, a little wearily; “but I never like painting portraits, it cramps my hand so for my pictures. However, I promised Robert I would do it to please him, and I wanted to get away from my Virgin just to know what



she was really like. I am longing, and yet dreading finishing her."

"It must be intensely interesting, like a living thing, when you are finishing a picture," said Josline, looking with a dim sympathy at the hollow face and deep-sunk eyes. "But you seem wearing yourself out."

"Oh! I have been resting, really, this afternoon in the pine wood," he said, with a happy smile. "Such rest! a kind of Paradise of dreaming."

"Do you call dreaming rest?" said Josline, wistfully.

"Most truly rest to me. I see, I hear, I do all I would, and my entire spirit reposes. I am never rested unless my spirit is without let or hindrance . . ." He stopped abruptly and gazed silently at her, then added softly, "I think it would rest me to be with you—you would not hurry my thoughts; some people make me go so quickly from one phase to the other, but you are like deep still waters."

Josline smiled; then as Gabriel shuddered slightly and coughed a hollow, echoing cough, she looked anxiously at the ominously darkening sky, and said—

"You ought to be going home, it's going to thunder."

He looked up, startled, and said nervously, "A thunderstorm! I can't bear it!"

"Do you know the short cut across the waste? No—I will show you; let us go at once. Good-bye, Nan! Good-bye, my baby! I will come again soon."

They set out rapidly, pursued by thunder-peals and faint flashes, still very distant. Josline was surprised to see how excessively nervous the artist grew. He hurried more and more as the wind fell, and the great solemn hush that precedes a storm appeared to overtake them. His pale cheek grew more and more death-like, and his cough more frequent as they hurried on their way; an unusual tremour shook his frame, and his thin, damp hands clung together. Suddenly he stopped, gasping for breath.

"You must leave me and go on," he said, brokenly. "I am suffocating in this heat; if I go on I may die."

Josline stood looking at him; he was livid, and the perspiration streamed down his face. She looked round in despair, and as she did so two large drops fell on her face, and a flash shone vividly behind the firs. "Take my arm," she said, very quietly. "I am not going to run away; there is an old shed near here, we will try and reach it before the worst comes on. If you stay here, hot and tired as you are, it will kill you."

"I cannot move," he answered. "I feel another step will kill me; I beseech you to go on, I'll watch you go, and if this paroxysm goes off I will follow you."

"I cannot go if you do not," answered Josline, very low and taking his hand, as one who should persuade a child, "Do try."

At this moment, without further warning, the sky seemed to open above their heads and a most awful flash struck close to them. The report appeared to be simultaneous, and the whole air roared around them, whilst the rain came down like opening the flood-gates of a river.

Gabriel reeled, throwing out his arms blindly, stunned by the horrible glare and roar. Josline hid her face, whispering "Oh, God!" For a few seconds they were too unnerved to move, then she seized his hand again, and said, "Come, come!" and they ran as well as they could across the space.

Before they half reached the shed they were thoroughly drenched, and the protection afforded by it was very slight, as it was so ruinous the rain poured in streams through the fissures in walls and roof. Gabriel tore off his coat, and they huddled closely together under it, but soon the rain came through the thin, worn material, and they stood up, shoulder to shoulder, for the ground was running with water.

Meanwhile the lightning shone in one vivid stream of dazzling, awful light, and the thunder crashed above them.

The sensitive, overwrought artist hid his head on one arm, whilst holding the coat over Josline's head with the other. She was pale and quivering, praying silently, one hand clenched, the other still clasping Gabriel's arm.

"When is it going to end?" he murmured. "It seems like the end of the world."

"Oh! what a flash!" said Josline, as the hot breath of the flame seemed almost to scorch her cheek. "I never was out in such a storm in my life; there!"

She couldn't help a half sob of terror as part of the timber at one end of the shed suddenly gave way and fell crashing near them, tearing her dress and grazing her shoulder. They were now more exposed than ever. The wind came rushing in, caught her hat and blew it off and away, nearly tearing Gabriel's coat out of his almost frenzied grasp. The rain poured on them, the lightning blazed, if possible, nearer and nearer. They were quite silent, pressed against each other, their pale faces strained between their hands. The girl was supporting the man, though they were neither of them aware of the fact. Their wet hair mingled and tossed together.

Suddenly, with an awful feeling of relief, they knew it was over.

Like the breaking of some unutterable and ghastly spell, the thunder died down, the lightning ceased, the rain stopped, the wind fell. It was over; they were still alive.

They stood apart again, looking in each other's pale faces, and knew that they had stood together in the very "Valley of the Shadow of Death," and come out unscathed.

"Thank God!" said Josline, faintly.

"Are you alive?" said Gabriel, a little wildly, touching her dripping hair. "I thought the flame went over you."

"It seemed to do so," she answered.

"God's angel sheltered you," he said, with a gasp. "I saw your face even when my own seemed hidden. It had such a look on it, clear as a star."

Josline looked at him, a little puzzled by his manner.

It was over now. The fury of the storm had gone across the waste, everything was dripping; growths of every kind lay low, smitten by its fierceness. Trees still tossed with a kind of frenzied after-passion amongst their topmost boughs.

They stepped out of their poor shelter, Josline gathering up her rent dress as well as she could; the wind blew her hair out, and she took her pocket-handkerchief and knotted it loosely round her head. Gabriel shivered and coughed hollowly.

"Oh, do go home at once and change," she said, anxiously looking in his face, which was nearly grey with exhaustion. "This is so bad for you. I will go home, too. I will not detain you one moment longer. I will come to-morrow and see the picture, if I may?" She turned hastily to go her homeward way, but the artist stretched out his hand and took hers gently.

"Good-bye," he said, softly, and in a tone Josline never forgot. "I think if I had had a sister, she would

have been like you." He lifted her hand to his lips, kissed it reverently, and then turned away and went swiftly across the lands.

Josline went quietly home, thinking incessantly of Gabriel's face, in the expression of which had come a sign that to her was legible enough.

The strange sympathy between the man and girl had deepened in that half hour of peril, till her soul seemed to see the working of his mind. She realized how much of completion she had brought to his power of expression; she acknowledged the joy her presence was to him; she saw she was his ideal. But with this knowledge had come a far deeper insight into the workings of his physical state; she had marked death in his face, in the strange eloquence of those wistful, piercing eyes, in the grave and unutterable pathos of tone in which he had said "Good-bye."

"Auf wiedersehen!" it meant, and she took it for that. Brother and sister! Well, so it might have been, for she felt it in every fibre—the sensitive sympathy with his highly wrought nature; the tender protecting longing to shield him from anxiety and pain. Any other form of affection or affinity would have been impossible on either side—to him she lacked passion; to her he lacked strength. Ideal as a dream, and as beautiful and intangible, was their mutual feeling, but it affected them both with the strange, all-embracing power a dream sometimes includes.

Under the syringa bushes by the garden gates, she found her uncle anxiously waiting. He hurried to meet her. "Oh, my child!" he cried, "Anima mia! soaked and trembling!"

"But all safe," she answered, bending to kiss him. "It has been an awful storm!"

In the evening, when sitting listening to the violin, Josline still thought of the unfathomable look in Gabriel's eyes. "It will not be long," she said, vaguely, then started at her own low tones, nor quite understood what she meant by the words.

Later, she sang, for Mr. Crosbie came in and would have what he called a "ditty." "*Chè farò*," she sang, and "*Auf wiedersehen!*" but her voice was weak, and Miss Barbara told her it was like a rake on gravel, and she had better go to bed. When she rose to obey, her limbs seemed to sink under her, and a flush of pain struck upwards to her brow.

Long, long she stood at the open window, clinging against the sill; and still like a phantom echo she heard in the night's silences—"Good-bye." He had only said it once, and now it rang a thousandfold from bush and brake. The violins went on below. Her eyes closed in the dewy, piercing fragrance of the night air, perfumed heavily with syringa, lilac, lily, and jessamine; her beautiful head fell on her folded arms and she slept. Whilst her heart beat quickly and



more quickly still, the flush rose and deepened on her brow, and the insidious fever, caused by the chill and excitement, slowly wound her round and round in its toils, and gathered to one burning thrill every pulse and spring of life.

## CHAPTER IX.

WORN out and weary, Gabriel climbed the stairs to his studio. For he was back in London; he had come up on the afternoon following the storm, to choose a fresh canvas for his picture of Lady Clinton and Gladys. It was in vain to think of trying to make the original do, he assured Sir Philip, and he would rather go up to town and choose out another and begin afresh. It would not be any very great fatigue, and in some ways he was glad to go up; he wanted to look once again on his beloved picture, for since the storm he had not seen Josline, but ever in his heart he saw her serene and beautiful face, and he longed, with an aching longing, to satisfy himself his picture bore the same expression—he thought it did, and he marvelled how it might be that he had known her face could bear that look.

“I shall never see her again,” he thought, as he caught the slight hand-rail to steady himself. “I have said good-bye, and it was for long. Auf wiedersehen! auf wiedersehen!”

He had come up by a late train, all was strangely dark and still, no lamp was hung out above, as was usual.

Twice Gabriel stumbled, and the second time he caught his breath with a click; hoarsely and thickly he breathed, and still slowly upwards he went, wondering whether Viola were asleep.

Suddenly, in the dark, there came wafted towards him a low, rattling noise, and a heavy smothering vapour.

What was it?

There was hardly time for reflection, ere, with a shrill cry, he sprang forwards and upwards, four steps at a time, burst in the studio door with frenzied power, and stumbled over something lying on the floor against it.

The studio was on fire.

One despairing glance, and he took it all in. Thin wreaths of curling smoke wound round and round the picture, with here and there a jet of flame burning brightly against it. Even as he entered, the shock of the bursting door shivered the charred easel, and with a crash it fell to the ground, and a fierce flare glared hotly in his face. The entire side of the garret facing him was one wide sheet of flame, and it hissed and rattled angrily now. Towards him came the leaping element, furious, red-tongued, and he stood stupidly petrified, paralyzed.

Then the flames were on him. He staggered on

one side, putting out one hand mechanically, as though warding off a blow. Thus doing, he became dimly conscious of Viola's body—he went and tried to lift her ; the fire caught his hair and played round his head. With a despairing struggle he dragged her just outside the door, let her fall, and drew the door to.

Then, suddenly, with a piercing cry of such anguish as stirred almost the unconscious Viola, he tore it open again. “ My picture ! my beautiful ! ” and plunged back into the very depths of the glowing studio.

The flames met him triumphantly, curled over him, struck at him, breathed hotly in his face, caught at his seeking hands. He struggled wildly, blindly forwards ; they repelled him fiercely.

There came a gasping sob, a catch for air, breath, life ; and he went down before them.

\* \* \* \* \*

The dawn was coming up the sky bright, glorious, beautiful, with her silver feet and her sweeping drapery of mist and cloud. A whistling, shrill, jocund wind heralded her approach, and sent the drops of a passing shower wildly and ringingly against the windows of the studio. A few birds flew twittering past, with dipping flight and sweet, low notes.

All was utterly, awfully still in the garret. A silence of death brooded over it. The flames had long been quenched, and only the blackened, and in part gaping walls showed how far their power had extended. But a Power greater than they held sway now.

The curtain before the painting window hung shrivelled and rent across the cracked panes and fallen flower-pot. The myrtle had been shaken from its root and lay a scorched and leafless stick on the floor, near the overturned chair, whose carving was almost entirely obliterated and defaced by the flames. The remains of the easel lay in all directions, charred, black, ruinous, as they had fallen on the bursting in of the door.

In the centre of the studio lay Gabriel Vannier, the painter.

He was almost covered by the long, trailing, blue garment, with the exquisite gold arabesques, that had won him Robert Watt for a friend. Its folds just caught the faint morning light, and reflected it back on him. His hands were folded across his breast, grasping convulsively the remains of his picture. Strangely enough, only its lower portion had been burnt; the face was still entire and uninjured. His eyes were closed, and the long, thick lashes lay darkening the wan cheeks. His lips were just parted and seemed on the point of utterance; but for him was no more speech or sound. The hair was burnt far back from the brow, and was darkened and singed, and yet the face was far from fearful to gaze on. It was as though one should stand and behold some rare, unique, and grand statue, which lay prone, dashed suddenly and ruthlessly from its pedestal.

A look of perfect rest pervaded the whole form and face. Doubtless, the artist was dreaming of Paradise no more, but enjoying its delights in reality. The rest he had so craved, and yet dreaded to possess, was his, suddenly, awfully, and yet mercifully.

Now, in repose, you remarked the chiselling—how perfect! of each feature; and you noted what genius, what empire of soul, reigned over all. The picture had, indeed, been his life; with it he had perished.

“I will, God willing,” had been his motto. God had willed incompleteness, and he had died with his work unfinished, and, doubtless, smiled now, knowing that—

“God’s greatness flows around our incompleteness;  
Round our restlessness, His rest.”

The door of the studio was torn down, and kneeling on the shattered threshold was Viola, wife of the dead man—the man she had, to all intents and purposes, murdered.

Her face was hollow, drawn, ghastly. She cried out now and then, with a harsh, gasping cry, as of an animal in torture, dashing her head against the door-posts; she twisted her hands in her hair, and wrenched them wildly free again, tearing it fiercely in her agony—the beautiful, bright, gleaming hair her artist-husband had used to caress long ago. She writhed and twisted and rocked to and fro; but ever with still and intense terror she kept her distance from the supreme quietude of the motionless form in the centre of the studio.

Once, when a bird flew against the shattered window, and the air stirred the blue covering, she shrieked out, wildly: "Gabriel! Gabriel!" then cowered back at the dead stillness, a stillness which might be felt, with a shudder that made each quivering limb shake in its socket.

The sun rose. The room became flooded with a golden glory.

The distant hum of the city, mingled with snatches of laughter and talk, came whirling faintly upwards, and died away on the threshold, dumb and deadened. Then came the echo of feet, and whispers—

"What? Gabriel, the painter, dead?—burnt?—what an awful death!—all his wife's fault!—set the studio on fire—tried to rescue the picture—burnt to death——"

Sudden, fleet as a thunder-cloud, Viola was in the chamber, with flaming eyes and burning brow. She lifted the dead man from his place, she gathered him in her arms, she wound herself round and round him, she kissed his lips till hers, burning as they were, turned damp and clammy; and she cried with a terrible, shrieking cry—

"Gabriel! Gabriel! Gabriel! Come back to me. I love you! I love you!—Oh! God in Heaven, have mercy! mercy! mercy! I repent. Gabriel! my husband! heart's love! Gabriel!"

She strained him closer and closer. The poor, dead fingers relaxed; the picture fell with a crash.



She caught the arms and dragged them round her neck; she pressed his face to hers. "Gabriel! Gabriel!" Her voice broke, strained, hoarse, gasping. The bitter tears flooded the still face lifted to hers, and streamed hot and scorching on the lips, dead, cold, and chill, that would never again win her with love tones, or chide her gently, or press hers in comfort and forgiveness; they had pleaded in vain. She had failed, failed to obey the crushed and broken heart that had always borne with her, loved her, forgiven her. "Gabriel! it was only this once! it was the last time! Never, never again will I yield——"

They lifted her away from him. They bore him reverently and gently from her; and still she called with that agonized cry—

"Only say that you have forgiven me, Gabriel! One word—a sign—a sound! Open your eyes! Gabriel! . . ."

It is only in Heaven that there is no last time.

## CHAPTER X.

It seemed impossible of belief that Gabriel Vannier should be dead, so suddenly, so awfully.

At Charteriss, they could hardly credit the hurried lines written by Robert, on his way up to London. The landlord of the young artist had telegraphed the news to him, saying that he knew of no one else who could or would manage anything for the wretched Viola.

Robert had carried the message straight to Hermione, and put it speechlessly into her hand.

She was extremely grieved. "How dreadful!" she said, turning very pale. "Of course, you will go at once," rising and going to the bell. "I will order Greyfriars, I think he goes fastest. You will catch the up-train."

"I was thinking," he said, "to-day they begin the high level road, by the firs. Some one must be there."

"It does not in the least signify. Stay! If you

will bring me the plans and try and explain to me whilst they are putting to, I will go in person."

He brought them into the great hall, and they went over the designs, and he showed her all he could.

Then he went up to London, scrawling a few hurried words to Sir Philip, between two stations. It seemed to him horrible; the wrenching asunder of life, and the incompleteness of the whole living. He took out Gabriel's last letter, which by some rare accident he had kept, and read it through several times; he had put off answering it, and now, no letter would ever reach him again. How sorry he was! How he longed to be able to have wrung his hand once more, and looked once again in the living beauty of the young earnest face! He went over again the first time of meeting in the old shop; the eager, wistful face that had so stirred him; the beautiful, pathetic voice that had so won him. It was strange, certainly, but to the matter-of-fact Robert Watt had come one of those rarely beautiful affections between man and man, which combine all the idyllic grace, purity, and strength of a first love. He had revered Gabriel's nature, as you would a child's heart. He had felt that he himself had never been so true to his best and highest nature and powers of thought and mind, as when with Gabriel. His friend had evolved in him a consciousness of appreciation of goodness and beauty and truth, such as nothing

else had done, not even his love for Josline. Indeed, his love for her was part of his new nature, acquired by his contact with Gabriel's earnestness and aspirations. Those two had always stood together in his thoughts, equal, and yet how different! First love and first friendship. It was to him, now, impossible to separate them. He could not think of Gabriel dead, without a dim prescience of evil overhanging Josline. They seemed of the same essence. That night when, during the tableaux, he had seen them standing together, their two heads caught and held in the same radiance of light and pleasure, it had entered his soul that they were intended to complete each other. It would, to any one, have been impossible to appraise either of them by an ordinary standard; and to Robert, who loved them both, it seemed now as though, in falling, Gabriel had tightened the links which bound Josline's nature to his, and that, therefore, her life must needs be in jeopardy likewise.

He felt restless and sick with longing to reach London and see for himself how all had been; and then, the picture! Ah! and now the portrait of Lady Clinton and Gladys would never be finished, nor should they ever get the full-length of Hermione, to hang by Sir Mark in the hall.

He leant his head back against the dusty cushions and groaned. He did not know why Gabriel had gone back to London in the midst of his visit to

Charteriss ; he knew nothing but the bare fact of the burning of the studio and the loss of Gabriel's life.

"What a horribly tangled-up thing life is!" he thought, thumping his head backwards and forwards. "Why shouldn't he have lived to finish it all up? It's an awful pity! What a mercy I've got the Eurydice picture!" Then his eyes filled and his throat felt tight, as he recollected that visit at Old Court. How happy they had all been! Of course nothing could ever be so jolly again. He thought, too, of his hurried rush up to London, eight months before, to fetch him down for the tableaux; of the out-stretched hand and the flush on the delicate face; and of their talks in the studio, and of—Viola. Well, he was out of it all now—the toil, and heat, and anxiety, and that woman. And yet he had seemed to love her, too, in a strange way. Well, she was beautiful; but what a cat of a woman!

Robert changed his mind about the "cat of a woman" before he left London. No one could fail to be softened by the awful misery of the desperate, forlorn woman, who was, after all, but a girl still in years. He wrote to Hermione about her, and they found means of sending her back to Italy, under safe and kindly care.

And the picture? Well, just as it was, charred to the edge of the round, small throat, Robert took it thankfully; had it placed in an ebony and ivory frame, and carried it away with him. He took, too, a port-

folio of sketches of the tableaux, paying Viola in gold for them; and a partially finished drawing, in sepia, of Hermione and Colonel Myddleton, in the Noel Paton tableau. It was wonderfully beautiful, quite as beautiful as the Virgin, and Robert knew that Hermione would gladly have paid double the price it was valued at. Colonel Myddleton's face and figure were fully designed and finished; but the artist had only shadowed in Hermione, as he had intended studying her more carefully when paying his promised visit to Enderby. As it was, she stood in a kind of mysterious glamour of light, looking like a spirit far more really than she would have done had the picture been completed.

So they laid Gabriel away to take his rest, and his works went down into the country; and his memory stood, like a fair statue in a cloistered garden, to be for ever something, unlike all else, to those who had known him and cared for him.

Years afterwards, when Robert Watt was a stout, elderly man, rich and easy, and with no necessary thought for anything but his horse and his dog, there would now and then come a shadow over the broad, level brow, the frank, blue eyes would dim, the loud, cheery whistle cease, and the "matter-of-fact, unromantic, easy-going fellow" would think tenderly and gently and passionately, as any grieving and mourning woman, of his first friend.

For "first love and first friendship are equal

powers," which grow, like a wound's healing, by the "first intention" only. All else is but glamour, and dies, as the gossamer must, against the light of further knowledge. And so throughout the strong man's life went the thought of his friend, a beam of dewy light and clearness, thridding all obstacles, like a rosary of prayer and entreaty.

When Robert, having unpacked the picture and the sketch of Hermione, and placed them in the bay chamber, brought her in to look at them; he silently placed in her hand a folded paper, in parts scorched and blackened. It was covered with fine writing, in a delicate, Greek-looking character. Hermione looked at him inquiringly.

"I found it in his pocket," he said. "I thought them very beautiful and touching, and thought you would like to read them; it seems strange that they may have been his last thoughts almost."

Hermione closed her hand over the paper, and looked long at the pictures first of all. Robert had put a chair for her and she leant back in silence, shading her eyes, and trying to see them as he had thought of them.

The blackened canvas of the Virgin had a curious and solemn effect, coming in against the extreme freshness and delicacy of the colour above it. It was rather like looking at a lovely, sleeping face hung round with crape.

"It's wonderfully like Josline Fairfax," said she,



at last. "And yet there is an expression in those eyes I never saw in hers. What could have given him that idea of her, I wonder?"

"He saw more things than most people, I think," said Robert. "He always seemed to see what people *felt*."

"Yes; but, somehow, in that face he has given an impression of brooding devotion that I should hardly have thought her capable of having experienced, much less shown."

Robert wondered what Miss St. John would think of the Eurydice picture, but made no mention of it.

"There is something very divine in that face," she went on. "I think it must be the best picture he ever painted; certainly, now and then, an artist throws a death-light on his creation. It was just before he died, too. Yes, it is the best part of him, I am sure." She got up and walked back a little, looking intently at the picture. "I wonder what the Fairfaxes would think of it," she continued. "I should like to hear what the old uncle would say; he always seems to me to have an intuition about Josline's moods."

"If you think he would care, I would take the picture and show him," said Robert. "They know all about it, and they were very kind to him once."

"Any one would like to see so lovely a thing," said Hermione. "I thought, perhaps, you would like

to go over to Charteriss and tell Sir Philip about it all."

Robert, too, had thought of that, and so it was decided.

Hermione read the curiously written poem in the evening. It had no title, it seemed hardly to have a beginning ; the end had been—death. It rang to her now like a voice from far away—an echo of organ music. This was it :—

"Why do I love thee? Oh, my love, my love !  
How do I know? I know thou'rt mine, all mine ;  
Mine, all my own ; of me, my heart and brain.  
Since that sweet night when cypress shadows hung  
A passion-pall beyond the terrace edge  
That stepped the iris border silverly,  
And mystic writing made the ilex leaves  
In arrowy sharpness on the marble walls.  
The stars hung out of heaven, the fireflies spun  
An aureole of flame. And oh, thine eyes !  
Thy voice was silent, but thine eyes, thine eyes  
They drew me like a light from far away,  
A pharos to the drowning, and I caught  
And held them with mine own. It was so still,  
The beating of the tree-frogs smote at times,  
A silver hammer on the pulse of night.  
Thy hand fell suddenly, a blossom cleft  
In opening ; mine on it like a husk  
Shut hard, brown, strong to nip. And over us  
The glamour of the holy night drove straight  
Our hearts together, and our souls stood up  
And strained until their wings met, pointed white,  
With fire extreme of consecrated love ;  
And strange, wave-beating harmonies divine  
Of earth and air and sea made melody,  
Of which our happiness was counterpart.  
Why do I love thee? Oh, my love, my love !  
Thou'rt all my own, mine own right utterly.

Let others, then, be happy in their way—  
Their way, not ours. They look on thee and love ;  
I look on thee and work—embodied thought  
Thou art to me. They look on thee, and thou  
Look'st back on me. Oh, difference supreme !  
Since that sweet night the world's aglow with love !  
How can I breathe and love thee not ? And thou  
Wouldst fain know why. In truth I know it not.  
Sink, Sweet, thy small, round chin an ivory ball  
Within the dainty hollow of thy palm  
Just cupped to hold it ; raise thine eyes to mine,  
Till all thy soul lies like a starry sphere  
Unshadowed. God love thee utterly,  
Thou purest of His souls, my soul ! mine own !  
Just part thy lips, and let thy breathing faint  
Flit like a perfumed wing athwart my cheek.  
So bend, until thy forehead's pearl hath split  
The dead gold of thy hair, as light a cloud.  
Turn, till the tip of thy small ear rounds forth  
A rosy bud from out a velvet sheath  
So soft to kiss. Lean slightly, curve thy throat.  
Ah ! now, indeed, my heart beats. Oh, my love !  
Supremely beautiful as all pure things,  
Clothed on with awful grace and God's own light,  
Why do I love thee ? Oh, my love, my love !  
Why do I breathe and live ? God wills it so.  
He took my life and thought, ' This one shall work,  
And, working, bring a glory on My Name ;  
For that his heart shall burn a consecrate,  
White flame ; I showing him a perfect soul  
Clothed on with perfect life.' What tho' I fail ?  
I shall hereafter meet thee, bodiless,  
And paint thee as a spirit ; this I know.  
Oh ! I shall paint aright in Paradise,  
With help of love. See, then, thou love me, Love,  
And let thy loving consecrate mine art  
And teach my hand sweet cunning. All this life  
Is but apprenticeship ; our hands must learn  
The sweep and fold, the steady guiding strain  
That shall evolve true work in Paradise.

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So—gather my faint head against thy breast ;  
I'm dying. Bend thy lips against mine own.  
Oh, peace, peace, peace! Art resting, love?  
I feel the white curve of thy throat, so warm  
Above my brow ; it used to make me faint  
For joy of perfect form. And soft thy hair  
Falls like a glory, flooding me with light.  
Where is my picture? Where? . . . Oh! how thy heart  
Is straining 'gainst my cheek! 'Tis very dark . . .  
I hear the wild birds singing in the dawn,  
Down i' the ilex trees, and all the world  
Lies grey in dewy shadow ; mystic light  
Comes beating up in waves, thin, veiling, slow.  
There is a little rift in yonder wall,  
There, where the lizard dwells ; he used to peep  
At us ; I doubt me he's abed . . . Ah! love!  
I'd thought to be a painter ; do not weep!  
I loved thee so, I thought the power would come  
To do a noble work for strength of love . . .  
Where is my picture? Where? Oh! let the light  
Just strike it like a chord of noble sound  
Made by a viola's tuning. Ah! I love  
That picture ; 'tis my last. Forgive me, love,  
Thou pure, sweet soul. My soul will stand up soon  
And drive its wings, fire-pointed, thro' my life  
That's ebbing from me now, for after-gain  
Of perfect power and truth. I thought to paint,  
And now I've come to die, and leave my work  
Half-finished, worthless, lost to every one.  
Ah, no! not worthless! Never more is work  
Worth nothing to the worker ; 'tis not what  
We work, but how we work it tells at last.  
God sees completion where we only plan . . .  
Where is my picture? Where? Ah! lift my head ;  
Blind not mine eyes with tears. Ah! beautiful,  
Dear work, my last, my best! Ah! let me work,  
Dear God, in Heaven ; give me work for Thee . . .  
There was a question vexed my brain I think.  
Why do I love thee? Oh, my love, my love!  
I cannot answer for I fail and die.  
I think I said why do I breathe and live?

God willed it so. And now I fail and die.  
 Yet not from thee; for ever more and more  
 In the Hereafter thou wilt know it, Sweet.  
 God love thee utterly! My picture dies;  
 I shall not find it in the coming Dawn.  
 But thee, but thee . . . The singing waxes loud;  
 The little frogs are clamouring, it seems;  
 The cypress shade hangs pall-like o'er the wall  
 The iris border silvers . . . Art thou near?  
 Oh, eyes that draw me! Oh, small hand that fell  
 A blossom cleft, fill up my stiff'ning palm.  
 Oh, loving heart, strain closer on my own.  
 I'm slipping, slipping . . . Is it thy soul's wings  
 That fan me on to God? . . .

Here is the Dawn!"

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Hermione finished the poem, and sat still, voiceless and thinking. What had he meant by that poem? she wondered. To whom had it been written? Who was the one addressed and so deeply loved? It was altogether mystic and impersonal to her mind. Had it been merely an abstraction, or was it his Ideal he had been thinking of in penning those wistful, dying words? In spite of the incompleteness of the answer to his yearning longing, there smote a strange peace through the rhythm.

It was an intensely hot night. Robert was walking slowly up and down under the cedars in the dusky light, smoking. His arms were folded and his shoulders rounded, his head slightly bowed. His powerful figure loomed against the silver river-light now and then. Hermione, leaning back on the window-seat, wondered how he had ever come to care, as she

saw he did, for the dreamy artist. It was the same sort of thing as though a sturdy oak should bow its crest, because at its feet had been wrenched away a plant of golden broom.

Something in Robert's attitude reminded her of the night at Charteriss, when, in the darkness, she had watched Colonel Myddleton standing at the end of the avenue. How long ago it all seemed now! How changed their lives! At this moment where was he? Travelling down to Southampton, to meet the ship, perhaps. If she could only know whether it had come in; and which it was. She roused herself with energy as Mrs. Match came in, and said—

"Do you think we could have a few people down here now, Mrs. Match? Is the house liveable for strangers? I want to ask Lady Dunstable, Miss Thorold, and Sir Vere Temple."

"Oh, yes!" chirped that most acquiescent of old ladies. "I could see that all was right in two days. The damask furniture in the gallery is not down yet, but we could easily do without it."

"Certainly, more especially as I mean to leave the old tapestry there," said Hermione, kindly. "I know there had been an intention of altering it, but, do you know, I cling to the old settees, and dusky, faded look generally." She held out her hand to Mrs. Match, who said—

"Certainly, certainly, just as you wish, of course. Dear Mark had thought you would like it fresh."

“ Yes, I know,” answered Hermione, softly. “ And I know *he* liked the old tapestry, and so do I.”

When Robert came in he was glad to hear Miss St. John thought of having guests ; it would make it easier to his mind to leave her for a little, and go back to Charteriss. He was restless with the shock and loss of Gabriel’s death, and, like all strong, healthy organizations, he longed to get away from the thoughts and grief, and be doing. Enderby, with its extreme quiet, its solitary uplands, its solemn woods, oppressed him and kept the burden weighing heavily.



## CHAPTER XI.

ONE afternoon, late, when Lady Clinton and Gladys came home from driving, they found Quarl standing on the steps, with Disko tucked under his arm. His curiously sardonic expression seemed to have deepened, and he called out to them in a harsh, creaking voice, by way of and without any further greeting—

“The beast is nearly starved and chained up tightly !” He was evidently much put out.

Gladys shuddered at the sight of the small, brown, puckered face. She had not seen the monkey since Gabriel's death, and, though doubtless most unjustly, she had so connected the catastrophe with the destruction of her portrait, that the animal was hateful to her.

“Don't let it touch me !” she said, childishly, and turning her head away with disgust.

“Nonsense !” answered Mr. Freeman, roughly. “You used to be very fond of it, and the poor

thing was so shy and flustered it would hardly come to me."

"Do you know what it did?" asked Dorothy, gravely. "Utterly destroyed our picture and caused poor Gabriel Vannier's death."

"Woman's folly!" said Quarl, angrily. "He would have died anyhow, and now I find the beast chained up so tightly its neck is quite marked," and without further word he turned and marched away along the terrace.

"He is in one of his worst moods; what can have happened?" said Lady Clinton, laughing kindly. "Let us go and find out what Philip has been saying to him."

Sir Philip was trying a young horse in the hollow way; jumping him over several temporary fences. They had to wait for some time before he had any attention to bestow on them. At last, after sundry trials both of temper and skill on part of horse and man, the rider dismounted; the noble, excited creature was caressed and approved of; Broom led him triumphantly off; and Sir Philip, whip in hand, booted and spurred, strolled slowly down by the road, and answered all inquiries.

Quarl had arrived rather unexpectedly, and found Sir Philip taking a nap in the conservatory, much to the slumberer's confusion. On his return to England he had heard at the club of Gabriel Vannier's death, but could learn no details, and so, with characteristic

impetuosity, he came straight down to Charteriss, as he knew the artist had been there painting. Sir Philip had told him all he knew, and Quarl had employed himself marching up and down, snapping off buds and over-blown flowers with delightful impartiality, grunting out now and then "Poor devil !" Then he had gone in to see the shattered picture, which still stood in the gallery, waiting for the hand which was lying dead and cold. Then he had suddenly asked for Disko, and when his host said that the monkey had been left in the stables, chained up, and never brought into the house since the outbreak, he burst into a perfect rage of upbraiding, and stamped off to the stables to fetch it, without listening to a single word of reasoning or excuse.

"He was in a wax," said Sir Philip, whipping his boot with his riding-cane. "He was as white as a woman, and used tremendous language. I can't think what took him. He's no end of a queer fellow."

"But didn't he say he was sorry about poor Gabriel ?" asked Dorothy.

"Not a bit of it ! He said nothing of any kind of pity. Once or twice, he said 'Poor devil !' in his contemptuous way ; but he was in an awful rage about the monkey, I can tell you ; he was quite white, and his lips trembled."

"I never could make him out, Phil," said his wife. "I never could understand how you could be so fond of him."

Sir Philip looked puzzled, and then answered, "Well, I can't explain, Dor, either ; but, you see, I've known him all my life, and he does such astoundingly kind things and at such sacrifice. He's awfully poor, and yet he made himself poorer, by giving up part of his income to educate his sister's sons, who are not a bit grateful, and say he ought to have them to live with him. Just fancy Quarl tying himself down to two beardless youths !"

"Well, it is good of him certainly, but——"

"There, don't make 'buts,' Dor ; women always do that," said he, rather impatiently. "It prevents him buying old china, and lace, and *bric-à-brac* of all kinds, and travelling, too, and that's an awful bore."

"But still, about Gabriel?"

"Well, I confess that beats me ; but I believe if we knew him inside, somehow, he's all right, and feels it awfully."

Dorothy linked her arm in her husband's, and was silent. She was puzzled, but she had great faith in the simple, loyal heart of Sir Philip, and had never known him wrong about man or beast yet.

The whole evening Quarl chose to behave like a bear ; he would hardly speak, and seemed only bent on stuffing Disko with nuts and almonds.

Dorothy watched him quietly ; Gladys shrank away from him.

It was so hot an evening that they all went on to the terrace after dinner.

Quarl wandered away with his monkey; Sir Philip and Gladys went off to the hollow way, to look for glow-worms and listen to the nightingales. Dorothy sat still under the great yews for some time, and then strolled off to the hanging woods. She was thinking intently over Mr. Freeman's behaviour and character; she wondered what that sort of man cared for or really thought of life and its various phases.

Suddenly she caught sight of him sitting on a fallen tree; the monkey was by his side, sitting up with a doleful expression. They were in a hollow a little below her, and she heard him speaking to the little animal. It could be no secret, so she listened. With one hand he held it away from him, with the other he was supporting its small chin; but the expression on his face, the tone of his voice, Dorothy had never seen or heard before. She stood still, spell-bound.

"You poor little beast!" he said, holding its chin tightly. "You poor little beast! How sorry you would be if you knew, as I do, that a better man than you or me lies dead by your fault; but they're unjust to you, poor brute! you *don't* know, and they treat you as though you did, and so I stand by you. But I am sorry, poor lad! You're both worth a better fate."

He stopped. The monkey moved uneasily, with a mournful kind of cry; it knew Quarl was sad, and

understood dimly that it was through its fault. With its head on one side, it put one small paw on his hand and looked wistfully and pathetically in his face.

Quarl was not looking at it any longer. Under the long pine branches the last evening lights smote with a kind of regretful radiance, as though loth to leave so fair and beautiful a scene. All was still, a brooding peace lay like an angel sleeping, with folded wings.

The two figures were motionless. The man gazing gravely into the dying glory; the woman smitten with remorse for having judged him hardly, leant against the bole of the tree that hid her from him, and thought how strange a being he was.

“A better man!” he muttered, “a better man!” Then he sank his head in his hand, and Disko crept into his arms.

From that evening Dorothy thought of and behaved to Quarl in a way that completely mystified that generally astute person. She spoke to him about subjects she had hitherto always avoided. In vain he sneered, to see whether he could not drive her into some explanation; in vain he mocked; in vain he gave her absurd advice; she would let him say his say, looking gravely and silently in his face the while, and then would return to the question, and quietly force out of him answer after answer.

She had fathomed him, he guessed, but how? Dorothy never revealed. She had written a long

letter to Hermione about him, and Hermione, who remembered a short conversation the night of the tableaux, returned a warm answer of belief in his goodness and kindness of heart.



## CHAPTER XII.

AND how did Josline care about Gabriel Vannier's death?

Nan Partridge, with her baby in her arms, stood at the low window of the housekeeper's room, gazing with unfeigned admiration at the lily's heart, which Mrs. Turgoose held out at arm's length for her inspection.

"I am astonished you never came here to see it before, when miss set such store by it," the housekeeper was saying to Nan. "It's all very well for you to come now, and I am sure miss would wish to know, but now it's too late, and, all white and pink she lies and looks away in front of her, and her eyes are that big you could a'most look at yourself in them."

"Is she that bad?" said Nan, anxiously, and involuntarily grasping her child more tightly. "She do take things to heart uncommon, surelie. I remember when young Mr. Watt, he went away, she was that pale and soft-spoken, you——"

"Nan Partridge, mind your tongue!" said Mrs. Turgoose, with sudden and awful solemnity, pointing at her till the startled Nan gasped, and felt strongly inclined to seize the offending member and hold it in her mouth.

"It's hung a deal too near your teeth," pursued the housekeeper, "when the likes of you dare to say our young lady takes on about any young gentleman, be he who he may," she ended, with superb dignity.

The abashed Nan, really innocent of all intention of daring, stood silent.

And at this moment, who should come striding nervously up the garden but the very young man in question. His hair was thrown back, his face was pale, his eyes had a straining look in them; under his arm was a kind of case, which looked very heavy. He walked so quickly past the window that he did not see the two women.

"He'll take it to heart, I'll be bound," said Turgoose, with a sudden and almost malignant triumph. "Patience on us! there goes the bell! I'll be bound Miss Barbara will be out on him, the wire is quaking now."

Miss Barbara was "out on him," indeed. She opened the front door herself, looking as though cast-iron were weak in comparison to her spine.

"Well, young man! Fine manners, indeed, to tear at the bell in that way! Is the house on fire?"

Robert, from pale, had turned vivid scarlet. "Miss

Barbara, is she worse?" he stammered. "They told me—she was—so ill."

"*They!* and who may *they* be?" demanded Miss Fairfax, magnificently, standing in the doorway with folded arms, effectually blocking all entrance, whilst the points of her black lace cap stood horrent like the feelers of an irate snail.

Now this behaviour had a very opposite effect to that intended, for Robert began to think Josline could not possibly be so ill if her aunt could stand thus bandying words with him. With a sigh of relief, he let his burden slide gently to the ground, and, lifting off his wideawake, he answered quietly, "They told me at Charteriss she was not well, and Tubal Partridge frightened me rather."

"That is the reason, then, the window-blinds do not fit," said Miss Barbara, and without further ceremony she turned round and went back into the house, dragging a set of hall-steps behind her into the parlour with clatter enough to raise the dead, and as totally oblivious of Robert's existence as though he were one of the stone balls in the garden. He, however, thought of the sick Josline. Leaning the case against the wall, he sprang in and carried the steps for Miss Fairfax, but at the parlour door she seized him.

"To-day it is the red squares," she said, sharply.

"The red——?" he paused aghast. Was this some horrible new disease?

“ You must step from square to square, don't touch the blue or green.”

The “ person of the house ” was rubbing gently against his legs. He looked down at her for explanation.

“ Well, go on.”

So on he went, but was again seized and dragged so violently on one side, that the steps clattered heavily against the unoffending puss, and produced a loud miau.

“ How selfish and cruel you all are, you young men ! ” said Miss Barbara ; “ now you must hurt my poor cat. Come this way.”

By this time the almost bewildered Robert saw that she was carefully walking on the red squares of the carpet, so he followed with awkward jumps.

The steps being placed, Miss Barbara mounted them and inspected the blind fastenings, whilst he stood with puss in his arms, looking at the pale portrait of Mistress Margaret, and longing with an aching heart for the appearance of Josline. But Josline did not come.

Miss Barbara presently turned round, descended the steps again, and then said abruptly, “ When did you come, and why have you left Miss St. John ? ”

“ I came to see how my father was getting on, and I brought a picture for Mr. Fairfax to see.”

“ More pictures ! He can't waste his money on them.”

“It is one of poor Gabriel Vannier’s, and I thought——”

“Oh!” said Miss Fairfax, her face softening. “If it was to help him.”

“No, it’s not to help him,” answered Robert, quickly. “It belongs to me, it’s one I bought long ago, he was finishing it for me when—he died. And so I thought Mr. Fairfax might like to see it; it’s very beautiful, and he took the expression from Miss Josline.”

He led the way to the hall, went up to the case and undid it, whilst Miss Barbara stood with her hands behind her, looking grimly on. She quite started when the cover was thrown back and Josline’s face, only with a starry gravity unlike anything her aunt had ever seen, looked out at her. She was silent, held by the grave depth of expression. Hard and inartistic as was her nature, she could not fail to be touched and even stirred by the extreme beauty and delicacy of the painting, considered merely in the light of a picture, and with no reference to the likeness.

“You see, it’s badly burnt,” he said, in a low voice, whispering almost with a sense of some Presence looking on.

“H’m,” answered Miss Barbara, still intent.

“Do you think Miss Josline would like to see it?” he ventured at last to say.

“No, I shouldn’t think of allowing her to do so, she is much too ill.”

Robert gasped, and then a kind of dumb fury seized him at having been so long beguiled out of the answer he had come to seek.

"*Is she ill, how long?*" he said, shortly.

Miss Barbara turned on him. "It is all your fault," she said, harshly. "You came here wandering about the place, and teaching her where all sorts of weeds and things grew, and she was always out after them; and then she got caught one day in a storm, got soaked to the skin, caught cold, and has been dying, yes, dying. Oh, you needn't stare so! It's the way they all go, it's the Vavasour blood, which is so unhealthy. How any one could think of marrying into such a flighty, good-for-nothing family, I can't imagine; and Dux, who was just as bad as them all—— Well, he's punished now, he's in a dreadful state, he never leaves her hardly."

"No, I should think not," said Robert, trembling. "What was it? What is it? Is she still so ill?"

"Inflammation of both lungs, chill all over."

Robert turned so white that Miss Fairfax felt a grim joy in piling on another the burden she had found so hard to bear. "It all comes of the selfish inconsideration of young people," she went on. "They don't in the least care how anxious their elders are. They are always catching cold, or cutting their fingers, or breaking their legs and arms; and appear to think they are much to be pitied. I should just like to know who is to be pitied most—they who



have the fun of it, or we who are worn out with anxiety."

Robert was silent, not quite seeing the "fun" for anybody.

At this moment Mr. Fairfax appeared on the stairs. He was coming rapidly down with a pre-occupied face, and caught sight suddenly of the two in the hall. For a second he looked unutterably vexed, then he came forward with outstretched hand. "Well, Watt! You find us very anxious, but she is better. I can't stop now, I have——" He stopped short, his eyes had fallen on the picture, he walked up to it. After a little he said, gravely, "Where did you get that?"

"Gabriel Vannier painted it for me; at least he was painting it when he died. I thought—Miss St. John thought you would like to see it, so I brought it."

"Gone to doom, what a loss!" said Mr. Fairfax, stooping down. "What talent! how exquisitely painted! Well, I didn't think him capable of painting like that. What talent! what talent!" he murmured, walking slowly backwards. "What a painting! What a gem! What peace in it! What grace!" He paused. "I can't say how beautiful I think it. Is it for sale?" he turned suddenly on Robert, who coloured scarlet; and before the young man could answer, Miss Barbara said sharply—

"No, Dux, no; and you have no money."



"Is it for sale?" reiterated Mr. Fairfax, stretching one delicate hand to hush his sister's voice as it were.

"No, sir," stammered Robert. "It belongs to me. I mean——"

"But you didn't pay for it. You mean you had ordered it, or liked it and got the refusal?"

"No, sir. I had paid for it, but——"

"Paid for it!"

"Well, he was so poor, and I had the money. I really didn't know what to do with it; it was an investment, you know," stammered Robert, more and more uncomfortable under Mr. Fairfax's piercing gaze.

"You meant kindly, I am sure," said he, with a sigh. "And you have been well rewarded; it's worth almost anything now—it's unique, exquisite."

"I thought you would like it, sir—Miss St. John thought you would, that's why I brought it. Do you think Miss Josline would like to see it?"

"Ah! she's too ill. We haven't told her of the poor boy's death. She couldn't see it without asking; you see it has been through the fire."

"You might tell her the studio had been on fire. I know Gabriel had talked to her about it, and she knew how anxious he was about it."

Mr. Fairfax, who never could rest without Josline's sympathy, longed to carry up the picture, but Miss Barbara sternly forbade any attempt at it.

He took Robert into his den though, whilst he put a new string on his violin, which he had come down to fetch in order to play to Josline.

Robert saw the lily heart standing in its place again, Mrs. Turgoose having restored it whilst he and Miss Barbara were in the cedar parlour.

“Yes, that Madonna is almost divine,” said Mr. Fairfax, who really found it impossible to keep his thoughts from dwelling on the picture. “I should like Josline to see it.” He paused, settling the string and screwing it up tightly.

“Do you think,” began Robert, nervously, “that you would keep it for me till I am settled at Enderby—give it house-room? It would be a great thing for me if you would. My father cares very little for pictures, and I really have nowhere to put it at present.”

“Ah!” said Mr. Fairfax, thoughtfully, lifting the violin to his shoulder and trying the string. “But you know it is of inestimable value, and suppose—suppose anything happened to it?”

“It has been baptized in fire—nothing worse could happen, I think,” said Robert. “And, besides, if Miss Josline would like to see it, I—I hope you will keep it here—for me, of course,” he added hastily, on seeing a sudden expression on Mr. Fairfax’s face that rather alarmed him.

Robert went back to his father’s house slowly, and in the very depths of depression. He had not seen Josline; Heaven only knew when he should again.

Her uncle had said extreme quiet had been ordered, and every species of excitement strongly forbidden ; she was to see no one out of the house, and was kept entirely to two rooms.

He wandered disconsolately about the village and Red House, and went up to Charteriss every day ; but the whole place seemed so empty and wretched that the gloom of Gabriel's death appeared even more unendurable here than at Enderby, where at least he had work out of doors and a great deal to occupy him indoors as well.

It was strange that in a degree Gabriel's death should have affected Josline, for he heard from Mr. Crosbie that it was in walking home with the artist that she had caught the severe chill.

"It's no good thinking about it, my boy," said the old man, kindly. "I give you the advice I gave you once before. Go and work ! If you stay on here you won't see her."

Robert twisted round on one foot and looked out of the little rectory window, nearly choking with disappointment. "It is hard," he said.

Mr. Crosbie was silent, nursing one leg. He knew very well that Robert loved Josline, though they had never openly avowed it. Suddenly the old man got up, and came across the room to him, laying one hand on his shoulder, but not attempting to turn him round. "Look here !" he began. "Her mother died of decline, her father led the wildest, wickedest life ; she

has no stamina. They may say what they like, Bob, she'll never be strong again." He stopped.

The young man did not move, an icy chill ran through all his limbs, his lips tightened till they were white.

"Look here!" the rector began again. "Go away! You can't see her now; you can do no good by staying here. To work! to work! I will write to you from time to time, and will tell you honestly how she gets on; believe no report but mine."

"You will tell me the truth?" said Robert, hoarsely, still staring out of the window.

"God's truth, boy."

"Very well." Without further parleying young Watt turned away and walked to the door. There he paused, holding the handle and turning it slowly round and round, and fixing his eyes on it. Suddenly he said, "Do you think she will die?"

There was a little pause whilst you might have counted ten.

"No, that is to say, not from this attack," answered her godfather.

"But you think——" He stopped to gulp down something. "But you think she will never be so strong again, that she will go into a—decline?"

The last word was almost inaudible. Mr. Crosbie looked at him for a few seconds deliberating, then he said, slowly, "I think——"

He never finished the sentence. The door opened

and closed hurriedly. Robert was gone; he could not bear to hear what he believed Mr. Crosbie was going to say.

Over the fallows and uplands, hurriedly up to the ridge he went; up to the place where he had met her that first evening.

It was beautiful, bright mid-day, very hot. The haymakers were sitting under the pollard oaks, eating their dinners, talking and laughing, or here and there sleeping a short, sweet sleep, buried in soft, perfumed grass. A few birds were idly wheeling mid-air. The horses from the empty wains stood resting their nose-bags on each other's broad backs in the shade. Down in the hollow, dim and misty with blue haze of heat, lay Old Court, with its twisted chimneys and gabled ends.

Robert leaned against the bank, pulling idly at the short grass, thyme, and harebells. His whole heart was full of bitter grief and longing. He thought if he only knew she loved him, he could bear this or anything—even to lose her; but the uncertainty, the refusal, wrung his heart now with acute pain. If she should die, would she ever know how deeply he cared?—what her sweet, young life had been to him?—that he should always try to live a better, higher, nobler life for having known and loved her? The salt tears stood in his eyes, and he caught his breath hard. Yes! old Crosbie was right, the only thing was to go away and work, *do something*, and not eat his heart

out with this gnawing pain. He'd go up to Charteriss and say good-bye, and go away.

He gave one last look at the walnuts in all their summer splendour, then turned resolutely round, drove his hands fiercely into his pockets, and strode away down the ridge.

And Josline had known he had been to Old Court. She had heard his voice in the porch talking to Miss Barbara, and that was the reason she had sent Mr. Fairfax down on the plea of wanting to hear the violin, lest her aunt should send him away unanswered or roughly spoken to. She lay panting and faint all the time he was there, thinking and wondering, and when Mr. Fairfax came up again, without word of his visit, she said nothing either, but her eyes grew so starry that the old man trembled, thinking of the picture.

Had he come back because he had heard she was ill? She lay and wondered, but she never spoke or asked a word; only her pulse went up and in that hot summer's night she wandered again, and Mr. Fairfax found that the only thing that calmed her at all was playing, "Oh, for the wings of a dove!" on the violin, over and over, and yet again.

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE *Hydaspes* had come in. Colonel Myddleton had waited till the last passenger had come off her, watching from on shore. Then he had gone on board, scanning each face with a half-averted look, but there was no one he knew to meet, or claim even a passing greeting. There was, of course, a great bustle and confusion, and he waited a little before making inquiries. Presently the steward came running up from the passenger's saloon, looked round inquiringly in the various faces, and finally came up to him and said respectfully, "Colonel Myddleton?"

"Yes," he answered, with a feeling of now or never.

"I have a letter for you, sir ; if you would wait for a second, I will bring it you." And the man disappeared again.

Colonel Myddleton got his letter, and went to the side to read it quietly ; but it was too long and very closely written.



“It is only waiting—my usual fate. I have done it before !” he muttered, closing his hand over it, after reading the first few words. He went on shore, and up the High Street to the Dolphin, into a dingy sitting-room through the narrow, close, encumbered passage. He shut the door, and drawing a chair to the old bay-window, sat down with his back to the light to read the letter. His mouth quivered once or twice, but the stern, set brow never altered. When he had ended he remained staring thoughtfully in front of him for a long while, with the paper crushed together in his fingers. He was going back in his memory some years. His hand fell by his side, and he murmured to himself, “Does she call that happiness ?”

He saw again a scene that was often present to him now :—A hot night in India, a man standing at a bungalow window, a very young girl in low, evening dress, her throat and neck seamed by the lashes of a whip, clinging frantically round him.

The perspiration sprang out on his forehead ; he shivered, and his face seemed to contract and age. The sounds in the street, the turmoil in the hotel, died away from him ; he heard only the shrill call of the jackal, the panting of the girl, the rustle of her dress, the strong breathing of the man. His fingers tightened till the veins leapt like strained cords.

Suddenly he rose to his feet with a gasp, thrust

the letter into his pocket, and, with folded arms, began walking up and down the room.

There was nothing to be done, that he could see, but to redeem his word, no matter at what bitter cost to him or to her. If it cursed both their lives—well, so it must be. There was no escape. If they both tried to work out their lives at their best, God would help, and time would slowly heal. What would *she* bid him do? What he meant to do, whether she approved or not; of that he felt certain, and therein lay the best and the worst of it.

If only there had not been this waiting now. What could have caused it? It would have seemed easier to have ended it all now, than to have gone on waiting and fighting.

He took out the letter again, and searched through it for a certain passage that puzzled him. "I have decided, at the last minute, to wait for the next boat. I do not think you will mind, will you? I think I am doing right. I think it will be wiser for us both. You say you do not wish me to hurry, and there are——" The sentence broke off abruptly. Apparently the letter had been thrust into its envelope in desperate haste, and given over to the bearer of it, without there having been time to sign it.

Now he thought it over he wished he had questioned the steward as to how he became possessed of it, who had given it to him, and what had been said.

A waiter came in with a letter for him. He opened

it. It was from Sir Philip, urging him to come to Charteriss as soon as his business was concluded at Southampton, saying they all wanted him, and he was to stay as long as he could. Later on, Lady Dunstable, Miss St. John, Mina Thorold, and Sir Vere were coming, and they meant to have a nice long visit from everybody, and be very jolly.

He folded the letter slowly. Should he go and meet her again before the writer of the Indian letter arrived? It was too great a temptation—he would. After all, why should it be impossible for them to be friends only? It was possible with a nature so noble and so entirely single-hearted as Hermione's. She knew—he had told her—it was impossible they could ever be anything else; and she had acquiesced and bidden him do what he had to do. But, thinking it out now, he made up his mind to one course of action that had not before seemed clear to him. He would go to Charteriss and meet her, and be as he was with others, but before they parted again he would tell her the whole entangled web, and then, once for all, she should decide whether they might be friends or no; and, perhaps, who knew, she, with her generous woman's heart, would know of a way to help them both, and make all their lives easier.

So he went to Charteriss, and was warmly welcomed by all.

Quarl was anxious in his inquiries after the passenger by the *Hydaspes*, but received the simple

answer that the ship had come in without bringing Colonel Myddleton the friend he had expected, and something in the set shortness of the tone deterred even the almost irrepressible Freeman from further questioning. He contented himself by saying—

“When a lady’s in the case, we know all other things give place ; but, I suppose, time and tide are sexless.”

Colonel Myddleton made no sort of rejoinder, and Sir Philip turned the conversation.

Gladys found her organ mornings interrupted by a very silent guest, who sat in the great window, reading history, but whose lifted head, at intervals, showed how much he was moved by the grand harmonies those very small fingers managed to evoke.

Gladys was restless and hot at heart. Robert’s flying visit, combined with his extreme depression at the last, had quite upset the merry maiden. She played, indeed, for the lack of occupation, and with an assiduity worthy of all praise ; but her thoughts wandered constantly to Enderby. Why didn’t Hermione ask her to go there as well as old Lady Dunstable and Mina ? She found it in her mind to grieve over this, and decided that it was very heartless of Hermione. The truth was that Miss St. John had written, asking her, but Lady Clinton had written back “No,” and so decidedly, that there was no further invitation possible. Dorothy had pondered long whether she should tell Gladys or not ; but finally

decided that it would be wisest to say nothing about it, and let the whole subject lie asleep.

Robert had said a few words to Gladys about his anxiety as regarded Josline; but Gladys, with all youth's disregard of consequences, hereditary tendencies, etc., etc., and, moreover, deeply imbued with the belief in the alchemic power of Robert's love, had rather scouted the idea of any permanent ill effects from so slight a cause as a wetting in a thunderstorm.

"She only needs to be happy," said the unconsciously wise child. "I always feel quite well when I am happy. I say, Bob, why don't you——?" Here his cousin came to an unaccountable full stop.

Robert looked at her a little uneasily, twisting a button rather violently round and round.

"Do you think if I did, it would?" he asked, incoherently.

"Yes," said Gladys, answering both their thoughts.

"Well, it's no go, then—there!"

Gladys was absolutely dumbfounded; she found nothing to say, but sat staring at her cousin, till he turned away angrily. Then, to his utter amazement and confusion, she burst into tears and ran out of the room.

Now, when Gladys came to think over this small episode, she could never render account to herself as to why she had cried. The fact was, it was from such an extraordinary mixture of feelings, that a

very philosopher could hardly have defined their individuality. Sorrow, hurt pride, anger, wonder, relief, and shame, all seemed woven into a thrill of pain, unendurable, save for the natural outlet of tears.

At first she had felt as though she must at once go down to Old Court and look at Josline, at the strange being who would have none of Robert Watt. She felt convinced that at any rate she must look different, now that she knew what she might have had. It was prodigious, incredible ! But, somehow, the days wore by, and she did not go there ; and as they lengthened and numbered, a counter-feeling deepened in Gladys and kept her away. She heard that Josline had lain at the very gates of death, and she began to think that it was grief for the refusal that had brought her so low ; and, if so, why then, of course, all would come round in time. She judged, not knowing the time when Robert had spoken, and only gathering from his few words that it had been not so long ago.



## CHAPTER XIV.

ROBERT had returned to Enderby, much before Hermione expected him, and without the picture. His explanation as to its whereabouts was slightly vague, and Miss St. John, though accepting the assurance that it was safe, gave a pretty clear guess as to its resting-place.

The new road being made was an engrossing occupation at this time, and Hermione could hardly account for the increasing depression of Robert. She began to fear he was really ill, and then—that he might have money troubles, for she knew nothing of Josline's illness. On his return she had asked him how every one was at Old Court, and he had answered, hurriedly, "Pretty well!" She watched him, quietly, but could discover nothing salient to judge by; but day by day he seemed in worse spirits. Could it be only the death of his friend which so weighed on him? She was afraid it must be some harassing debt—then how to help him? Hermione had a keen feeling for any weight which appeared to hang on any one un-



acknowledged. She acted accordingly, and then found she had been entirely wrong, and was more puzzled than ever.

She had ridden out to the new road, and was sitting on her horse, close to where Robert stood, watching the men blasting, when he said, suddenly—

“What’s the good of money?”

Hermione turned scarlet to her very hair; and being startled by his own voice, for he had not meant to speak aloud, he said, on noticing her colour—

“I beg your pardon, Miss St. John, you must think me mad; but the fact is a very funny thing has happened to me, it puzzles me awfully.”

“What is it?” said Hermione, looking straight in front of her.

“Why, some one, who I haven’t a notion, has paid in five hundred pounds to my bankers. Just look here,” and he handed her a letter which she had seen him receive that morning.

“How odd!” said Hermione, curiously scrutinizing the handwriting, whilst her colour deepened. “It’s like a thing in a book, getting money in this way.”

“It’s no good looking at the writing,” he said. “It’s only a clerk’s hand, though I was stupid enough to look it well over, too; but it’s only a notice that there it lies, and it may lie, for I am sure I don’t want it. If it was only money!” he ended in a mutter.

Hermione, feeling considerably crushed, returned him the letter in silence.

"Well, it's an odd thing, isn't it?" he said, more cheerfully. "I don't suppose many a fellow has such luck—confounded good luck! Just like me;" and he laughed.

"Yes, I think you are lucky," said Hermione, gravely.

"Do you?" he answered, bitterly. "Well!"

There was a short silence, and they had to retreat a certain distance before the men set fire to the powder.

Robert laid a gentle, caressing hand on the neck of her horse, saying, "Ah! dear old Redskin would have had me off in no time."

"Why don't you get him back again with this money?"

"By Jove! I beg your pardon, Miss St. John! that is a grand idea. So I will if I can."

His face lighted, as Hermione had not seen it for weeks. And she eventually rode home, feeling pleasantly that, after all, money was not such a despised thing; but still the cause of his depression remained more mysterious than ever.

Redskin, however, was redeemed at an exorbitant cost and came home, handsomer than ever, to his enchanted master. Indeed, Miss St. John wondered which was the happier of the two animals—the quadruped or biped, they seemed so thoroughly one when

going full stretch over the breezy uplands ; and she admired the fine chestnut, to even Robert's satisfaction, and smiled with pleasure, whenever he wondered, as he often did, "Who that no end of a good fellow could be who had done him such a good turn." And she was, indeed, repaid for her—mistake, when he suddenly ended one day, "I shouldn't wonder if that capital fellow, Myddleton, hadn't done it ; just like his quiet way of doing things."

Hermione kissed the flower she was holding, till it expanded under the gentle, warm pressure ; but she only said, quietly, "I should have thought Colonel Myddleton had no money to spare."

"That's just why I think he did it," said Robert. "It's only the poor people, who can't afford it, who do those generous things ; rich people never do." Then, as Hermione laughed, he ended, simply, "I wasn't thinking of you. I know you do splendid things that nobody knows about ; but you don't know what noble things Myddleton's done in his life."

Whether Hermione thought that, in this instance, Colonel Myddleton was the munificent and purposeless donor was never revealed ; she made no answer.

If it were the money, or Redskin, or both, or indeed neither, something had brought back animation to Robert, and Hermione was satisfied. He rode about nearly as cheerily as ever, whistled and chattered, and began to show renewed interest in the steward's house, which was nearly completed. And now and

then Hermione allowed herself to fancy what Gladys would think of it ; but yet not often, for, though she believed that Robert's attachment to Josline would never end as he wished, she could hardly contemplate his caring for Gladys deepening into love.

There came, about this time, better accounts of Josline from Mr. Crosbie. She seemed to be making real progress in the warm, sunny weather, and was now allowed to sit up a little, by the window, in the huge, old "winged" chair that had once been put into the west room for poor Gabriel Vannier.

"Well, Turgoose ! what do you want ?" in Miss Barbara's sternest tones, startled Mr. Fairfax one morning at breakfast, as that excellent domestic put her head cautiously in at the half-opened door of the cedar parlour.

"Miss Josline is waiting for her egg, ma'am."

"Well ! why don't you take it to her ?"

Turgoose came, mysteriously, a little further in and said solemnly, "Jane Grey will not lay it this morning, ma'am, please ; what am I to do ?"

"Nonsense, Turgoose ! She always lays one every morning. You wish to give me the trouble of coming out," answered Miss Barbara, shortly.

"My dear, what does it signify which hen lays the egg ?" said Mr. Fairfax, with a comical smile.

"Jane Grey knows her duty, Dux, and I can't allow her to play these pranks," said his sister, in an irate tone. "Go and do as I told you, Turgoose."

The housekeeper retired, and presently came borne faintly a wild scrimmage amongst the poultry, which caused the "person of the house" to raise a meditative head. Mr. Fairfax was much puzzled to think what could be going on, but the dark frown of fate on his sister's brow warned him to constrain his curiosity.

Presently back came Mrs. Turgoose, hot and panting, "She is that wilful, ma'am, I can't catch her."

Speechless, up rose Miss Barbara and stalked to the door.

Mr. Fairfax could stand it no longer, he followed at a discreet distance and beheld the following curious scene.

Miss Barbara stood on the threshold of the back door, clucking vociferously. All the hens, ducks, etc., came trooping, except one small, grey hen, which timidly remained perched on the edge of a bucket at some distance, and totally resisted all Miss Fairfax's blandishments.

In vain grain was thrown to it ; it was called by every endearing name ; it would not attend, but tipped about miserably on the edge of the pail.

"Turgoose, you must fetch it, I suppose !" said Miss Barbara.

Turgoose proceeded cautiously towards it, but, unluckily, the "person of the house" felt a strong inclination to inspect matters nearer, and on approach-

ing the pail she made such lengthy strides and put on altogether such a feline expression, that Jane Grey, with a desperate cluck, made a sudden flight past Mrs. Turgoose, and alighted on a partially demolished rick near Miss Barbara. Alas! good Biddy. Miss Barbara, with a dart of triumph, pounced on the bird, tucked her safely under her arm, possessed herself of a bunch of nettles, handed to her by Mrs. Turgoose, and whipped the tardy layer well! Then, amidst cries so discordant that the perplexed Mr. Fairfax clapped hands to his ears and retreated, the disgraced, ruffled, and shrieking pullet was shut up in the hen-house, with the admonition to be quick! And Miss Barbara retired with the amazed "person of the house," who, tail in air, marched solemnly on before.

Miss Barbara sat down silently before the urn, flushed and triumphant.

Her brother looked at her curiously a while, then he said, quietly, "Barbara, do you really think that treatment efficacious?"

"I never knew it fail," was the short answer.

What more proof could any reasonable being desire?

The fact remains that shortly afterwards Josline got her egg, and Jane Grey clucked to her heart's content.



## CHAPTER XV.

GLADYS danced merrily up and down the lime avenue, which was now in splendid beauty, and so filled with perfume as to be almost overpowering. She snatched at the pendant boughs here and there, in her race with Disko, filling her hands with the pale starry blossoms, so fragrant and so fresh. She had heard that morning of what she considered a quite delightful arrangement: Lady Dunstable, Mina, Sir Vere, and Hermione were all coming to Charteriss, for a fortnight's gaiety, in the shape of laying the foundation-stone of a new hospital at N——, and there were to be balls, and bazaars, and picnics, etc., etc. Afterwards Hermione would go back to Enderby for a few days alone, and then—and this was the climax—they were all to go there, too, and the old house was to be opened and “warmed;” for that the fêtes in progress were a dim mystery of unutterable delight. Gladys had escaped from the dining-room, on this fresh and glorious day, and was trying to work off her excite-



ment in mad pranks with Disko. Her slight girlish figure was nearly as lithe as the monkey's, and she was now racing light as air, now swinging herself on the graceful sweeping boughs, which here and there nearly swept the ground. Her short golden hair spun out round her head like an aureole of sunlight, her eyes danced, she sang and thrilled away to herself, and was altogether the very incarnation of youth and gladness.

"Oh! you nice little monkey!" she said, stopping to hug Disko. "You shall have anything you like in the way of sweet things." Then she tossed him mid-air, and left him swinging on a bough, and ran towards the house again.

Josline sat by the open window of her room, listlessly in the great winged chair; her head leant sideways, her hands lay idly in her lap. On the windowsill, and on the low roof that sloped away outside, her pigeons stood, a dappled cloud of silver and shadow; they were murmuring to themselves, preening their feathers in the sun, walking over and over each other. The delicious air swept in and gently touched her thin cheek and lifted her heavy hair, but she did not seem to heed or hear anything; her eyes were half closed, she was listening, but even that only half-consciously, to the sounds of the violin below. She had always looked dreamy and spirit-like, but now there was a something in her pose which spoke of no possible earthly future of gladness and life. On the

table by her stood the same tall Venetian glass that had held flowers for Gabriel—it was full of lilies ; and, in a low wide dish by its side reposed a wealth of roses of every shade, with here and there delicate fern fronds curling over the pierced china edges. The catching cough, which had a few months before irritated Miss Barbara so strangely, was silent ; and there was no sound whatever in the room, save the cooing of the doves, the faint outside rustle of leaf and flower—the almost imperceptible thrill of life, that becomes evident on a fresh and beautiful morning in summer.

Presently, the violin ceased. Josline opened her eyes wide, and saw standing close to her, Gladys—Gladys, in all her bright, healthy activity. She smiled, and stretched her hand towards her, and Gladys, appalled at she hardly knew what, bent down and kissed her.

“ How ill you have been ! ” she ventured to say, in a whisper.

Josline smiled faintly. “ I am rather tired,” she said, but made no further allusion to her not moving.

Gladys sat down quietly. She could not think after all, why she should be so startled by Josline’s appearance ; she looked much the same, with the shell-like tinting on brow and cheek, the brilliant dark eyes so limpid and deep. It was probably the extreme quietude and silence that struck her, and then Josline was certainly much thinner, but she was

so fragile and so exquisitely delicately made, that it hardly struck you as a fact.

It was necessary to say something soon, so Gladys began. "I came to tell you that Miss St. John is coming to us, and all of them"—vaguely—"soon."

A deep tide of crimson welled over Josline's face, then faded; she looked up eagerly and met Gladys's gaze. The mention of Hermione's name appeared to have acted like a spell on both of them; they neither of them thought of her, but of Robert, and they both knew their mutual thought. Josline closed her eyes, speechless; Gladys sat gazing at her. What would he think if he could see her thus?

There was a faint fumbling at the door, and Mr. Fairfax appeared, carrying under his arm what appeared to be a large portfolio.

He pulled two chairs forwards, rested the shrouded thing on them, and then, coming up to Josline, he said, drawing her head against him, "Now, my Anima! I've brought you a beautiful thing—the picture I told you of last night."

Josline, who had twined her arm lovingly in his, with an almost convulsive quickness tried to raise herself, as he drew off the cover and showed her the Madonna. She did not speak, but two large tears slowly gathered in her eyes and rolled down her face as she looked.

"He was so fond of that picture!" she said at last, in a stifled voice. "It's very beautiful!"

“ And was it not good of young Watt to leave it for you to see ? ”

“ Yes, very,” she answered. “ I am glad I have seen it. It’s very beautiful, and how sad ! ” She sighed and leant back again, still gazing at the face.

“ What a pity it was not finished ! ” said Gladys.

“ I think I like it best as it is,” said Josline. “ It is like his life ; somehow, it was not meant to be finished.”

For Mr. Fairfax had at last told her of Gabriel’s death, very gently, and sparing her every painful and even sad detail. She knew only he had died, and thinking of him as in the last time, when he had said good-bye, she was not surprised ; indeed, she was glad.

“ It is like my beautiful violin melodies,” said Dux. “ I sometimes think that if, when I am playing some strain that appears to work in and out till my every pulse is beating in unison, I could just draw out one concluding tone so deep and full as to include all, I should really die of joy.”

“ Yes, you always understand,” said Josline, with a quiet, peaceful confidence.

“ Shall I leave the picture here ? ” he asked, and she acquiesced.

After showing Gladys downstairs, he went slowly up again, and stood in the doorway, which was unclosed and only sheltered by a screen. Josline was leaning back again with closed eyes. His filled with

tears. How unlike the bright girl he had known from childhood, always dreamy and gentle, but still always up and doing something.

He went up to her now, drew a chair near hers, and her head sank slowly, and almost, as it appeared, without volition on her part, against his breast.

“Are you very tired, my child?” he said, gently.

“Yes, I am always tired now,” she answered.

There was a short pause. He took one of her delicately formed hands in his own hardly less delicate palm, and held it up to his cheek.

“Are you ever going to get strong again?” he said.

She nestled a little nearer to him, lifting her tremulous, veined lids, like the petals of a harebell.

“Oh! Dux, who knows? I dare say——”

There was again a pause, and then she said rather quickly, “Did you love my mother very much, Dux?”

He did not start, but his face paled. “Yes,” he answered, softly; “there never was any woman like her in the world to me, Anima.”

“Should you think a promise ought to be kept through everything?” she went on, with apparent divergence of idea.

“Do you mean a promise made knowing what the full meaning implied?” he said, with a bound of terror at his heart, that almost choked him.

She was silent, then said, “Would it make any difference not knowing?” For one instant a perfect

glory of happiness lighted her face, and seemed to thrill down to her very finger-tips.

He felt her slight frame vibrate against him, like a chord of the violin at supreme tension. "Josline," he said, in a low voice, trembling like herself, "what do you mean? Speak more plainly!" He pushed his hair back, whilst he fixed his eyes in intense anxiety on hers, which dilated under his gaze.

"I mean, supposing a child made a promise, ought it to keep it?"

"Yes," he said, not daring to hesitate.

"Even if it didn't know what it was promising?"

"I suppose so," he answered. "Unless—unless it afterwards discovered that it held a wicked meaning."

There was silence, their two hearts beat loudly as they continued looking at each other. Mr. Fairfax felt as though he had never loved her as he did now in the terrible thought of losing her, or losing the best part of her.

She gave a little moan presently, and closed her eyes, then opened them quickly, and said, "You loved her *very* much?"

"Yes."

"Would anything she could have done have grieved you?"

"I think not," he said. "Josline!" he added, with a sharp catch in his voice, "don't torture me."

"Then it doesn't matter," she said, laying her



cheek against his. "It will be all right to you, because you loved her."

"But—but if it grieves you, my child?"

"It is all *right*, you know. I shall see it some day, too," she answered, looking away over the sloping roof and the pigeons, far out to the ridge. "I begin to see it is right now, even," she continued to murmur; "for this is the beginning of the end, and it will be better for us all." Her voice died down.

"Josline," he said, gravely, after a little while, "I want to say one thing to you. Nothing is best in our lives that we can by any possibility make better."

She looked up at him a little uncertainly. "Ah! what is best?" she said.

"God knows, my darling. There is only one rule towards the highest—endure!"

"I do try," she answered, with a tired look that wrung his heart.

"Can you tell me what it is you try to endure?" he said. "Could I, perhaps, not help you?"

"Some day you will know," she said, looking solemnly up to him, "and you will not mind because you loved her so."



## CHAPTER XVI.

CHARTERISS was full again; but Gladys was not so happy as she had fancied, for Robert Watt had not come with Miss St. John. He was too busy looking after the arrangements at Enderby; he could come later, or perhaps pay a flying visit or two between times, but one of the guests who was to stay for the actual laying the foundation-stone, etc., he was not.

Colonel Myddleton and Hermione had met very quietly and easily, both being natures under great self-control. If there had been any slight paleness on her part, any increased gravity on his, they hardly knew it themselves, and certainly no one else discovered it.

They both thought each other changed; perhaps Colonel Myddleton thought her most altered. It seemed to him that she was taller and slighter than ever, her eyes larger, her cheek less rounded, but he was glad and thankful to notice that she moved as easily and quickly as ever, and that to all outward

appearance no ill effects remained of the immersion. He discovered and acknowledged also that she was dearer than ever to him, peerless and compeerless.

He stood looking at her one evening, watching with a strange possessive pride the small stag-like head, with her coils of magnificent hair, and thinking that surely never before had there been so fair and so stately a woman of her race, when old Lady Dunstable made her way across to him, and leaning on her ebony stick, she said in her dignified way—

“Excuse me, Colonel Myddleton, but I have always wanted to ask you a question—it is this, why did you go to India?”

He turned round and looked at her in surprise; her eyes met his keenly, and then moved with his, guided by magnetic power, to Hermione. There was a slight pause, the old lady put up an ivory, mittened hand and settled the diamond that clasped the lace *fichu* under her chin; then she went on quietly, “I think no man should go to India unmarried, or, if he does so, should return unmarried.”

“I should say you were quite right, madam,” he answered, without looking at her.

“Then you went to and returned from India to avoid either extreme?” she said, quickly.

“So it appears by the way you would imply,” he replied, very quietly.

“Ah! you are very honest, meaning to be very subtle; and I am very rude, meaning to be very

kindly, eh ? See how Mina is crushing those flowers with her dress. Then, now you are in England, behave as an Englishman ; go in and win, monsieur the colonel ! ” she ended, with a charming smile and reverence, moving away.

He bowed, as he moved a chair out of her way.

“ They are so severe, these English,” she thought as she appeared engrossed with Mina, and was actually scrutinizing each face in the great mirror that hung near the organ. “ Now, why do not those two proud people, who are the only people in the house capable of a *grande passion*, speak out and be happy ! C’est mystérieux cela ! They love each other profoundly, but being English they will probably die before they will let each other know it. No, I shall never understand this character ! Now, my Mina was wise ; she wanted to marry that dry old Sir Vere, and she let him see it, and when I would not give in she went into hysterics. Now that explains itself ; she wanted to marry him. But this grave colonel *loves* that tall girl, and therefore does not speak ; and she doesn’t care whether *he marries* her or not, but will take good care to marry no one else, and will probably die unmarried for his sake. It is ridiculous, this, and I at my age am quite upset by it ; but to live near a *grande passion* is upsetting. And to think that they haven’t even an expression conveying what I mean by a *grande passion*, they who understand exactly what it is. Oh, this nation ! this nation ! ”

The two who, according to Lady Dunstable, so thoroughly understood what the *grande passion* was, went quietly on their respective ways, whilst Mina Thorold and Sir Vere kept the whole household much amused by their alternate quarrels and makings up.

Quarl gave them no peace, with his sarcastic allusions and biting remarks, but neither of them appeared to care, and braved all criticism with a generous disregard of outward observance that enchanted Sir Philip and scandalized Gladys, and made Hermione draw her fine brows together till the line between them lay like a scar.

One day, when Lady Clinton was laughing over some more than usually absurd manifestation on the part of Sir Vere, Gladys said, suddenly and crossly almost, "Ione! why don't you speak, instead of always reading that book?"

Miss St. John looked up, smiling. "What do you want me to say?"

"Why, what you think."

"Well, but supposing I don't think?"

"It's disgusting."

"It amuses them," answered Hermione, still smiling, and turning the leaves slowly.

"And it amuses us," said Lady Clinton.

"But that's the dreadful part," urged Gladys, hotly. "It oughtn't to amuse us, it ought to——" She stopped.

"What?" said Quarl, suddenly appearing.

"Shock us," finished Gladys. "Only Lady Dunstable says we are always being shocked."

"I heard her ladyship discussing it with that dry mountain Myddleton the other day. She said what could you expect from those two—to them love and marriage were mere *bagatelles*, synonyms."

"And so they ought to be, not *bagatelles*, but synonyms," said Lady Clinton.

"Ah! pray express that opinion, Lady Clinton, as much as you please, you won't convert anybody in these days."

"Now, Mr. Freeman, what is your wicked meaning?" said his hostess, a little gravely. "I don't quite like this rough and ready way of speaking."

"I mean," he answered, with a curious dark frown, and looking at Hermione, "that if you love, you don't marry; and if you marry, you don't love."

"Do you speak for yourself, or for men in general, pray?" said Lady Clinton.

"I am not speaking for myself at all, I am not speaking generally in the least, I am speaking for one man in particular, and that person is Colonel Myddleton."

"Perhaps you will let him speak for himself, then," said a cold, grave voice in the doorway. There was a slightly nervous movement on every one's part, except Hermione's, who had not lifted her eyes or moved her lips, nor did she now. Quarl smiled contemptuously, leaned back against the wall with folded

arms, and slightly bowed his head with a sweeping movement.

There was a curious vibration in Colonel Myddleton's voice, like the straining of a dog held in leash. "What were you repeating as my assertion?" he said, looking full at Quarl.

"I was repeating what you said to Lady Dunstable about marriage. Your own views, I presume, or, perhaps, *some one else's!*" There was a covert menace in the tone.

"They were my own," said Colonel Myddleton, at once, more calmly than before; "but you did not add the conclusion." He paused slightly, and Freeman said, in his most biting tone—

"Because you came in behind me so conveniently, to add anything you liked."

Hermione lifted her eyes with a perfect blaze of light, and clasped her hands tightly, speechless. Lady Clinton laughed nervously, and said—

"I think any one may explain——"

"There is no explanation needed, let me assure you, Lady Clinton," broke in Colonel Myddleton, in his deepest and most frigid tones. "I never say anything regarding my views on such subjects, which I hold of *all* most sacred, that I fear to own to and stand by. I said exactly what Mr. Freeman chose to repeat to you; but there was conversation before, and my conclusion was this: The man who cannot marry where he loves, leads, of all men, the forlornest life;



the man who marries where he does not love, God judge him, and not I!"

The erect, soldierly figure stood perfectly still whilst uttering these words; then, without further remark, Colonel Myddleton turned round and walked out of the room.

"Highly dramatic! I hope it had the proper effect," said Quarl, straightening himself, with a snort.

"It gives his words a totally different meaning, though," said Lady Clinton, thoughtfully.

"There are some people before whom everything must be whitewashed," answered Quarl. "Colonel Myddleton knows that young ladies"—with a deprecating bow right and left to Hermione and Gladys—"have strict ideas about love being necessary in marriage."

"I think you are quite hateful!" burst out Gladys, white and shaking. "I think Colonel Myddleton is a noble man, and you are mean!" with which startling climax and amidst a loud "Hush, Gladys!" from her sister-in-law, she went across the room and stood by Hermione, clasping her hand desperately.

Quarl laughed discordantly and a little harshly, "Heigh-ho! for the dramatic effect. Well! Miss St. John has said nothing!"

Lady Clinton looked a little nervously at Hermione, who sat silent, with a strange intensity of expression.



She made no answer to Mr. Freeman, but retaining Gladys's hand, stroked the cold fingers gently and continuously.

Quarl moved a little uneasily in the pause; and then, as though something compelled him to utterance, he said, hoarsely, and with an intonation that startled Lady Clinton, "Perhaps Miss St. John feels too deeply to speak, or, perhaps, she despises me too thoroughly to answer me."

"Perhaps!" said Hermione, slowly at last. She rose as she spoke, tall and slender, grave as an avenging angel.

"Which perhaps?" he said, staring at her, and, though pale, frowning and smiling together. Then, as she paused, he said, "Or would you like to stay behind the privilege of your sex, a subterfuge?"

"In this case there is no need," she answered, calmly and distinctly. "Perhaps—both!"

Then taking Gladys's arm, she walked quietly from the room.

Lady Clinton shook all over. She felt there was something truly terrible under all this control and rapid thrust and repartee. Hermione so rarely spoke with such intensity. Quarl, she had never seen so moved; she dared not look at him, after the first rapid glance on Hermione's leaving the room, in which she had seen that he was deadly pale, and that he had bitten his lip till it was black.

She bent over her work in silence ; she heard him clear his throat rapidly twice or thrice, and fully expected that the next thing would be his farewell ; then she heard the door close, and, looking up, found herself alone. Throwing her work on the nearest table, she sprang up and rushed to find Philip.

## CHAPTER XVII.

“Now, Phil, wasn’t it awful?” ended Lady Clinton, as she finished relating the scene enacted between Hermione and Quarl in the last chapter.

“Well, about awful!—well, it’s more than awful, it’s odd. But, I’ll tell you what, Dorothy, there’s something not quite square about dear old Duke; it’s my opinion he’s in some confounded mess!”

Lady Clinton’s eyes grew very big. “Do you think, Phil, he’s privately married, then?”

“I shouldn’t like to say he wasn’t, or oughtn’t to be!”

“Oh, Phil! I don’t believe it for one moment!” said his wife, with a piteous sigh; then, after a pause of thought, she said, “I don’t believe it; it’s not like him. No!” she added, with sudden energy, “I don’t and won’t believe it!”

“Well, it’s very queer. I do wish to goodness that idiot of a Quarl would hold his tongue about things!”

"Do you think he knows anything about it then ? "

"He thinks he does, from something he said to me ! "

"What ! Oh, Phil, *do* tell me ! "

But her husband was impenetrable, for the time being, at any rate ; so she had to content herself with the strongest reiteration of her belief in Colonel Myddleton.

"It's a bore, though, the whole thing !" said Sir Philip, getting up and handling a favourite gun he had been brushing up when his wife rushed in. "It's more a bore because of Miss St. John."

"If you had only seen her, Phil," said Lady Clinton. "She really looked too beautiful ! "

"I dare say she did. But I tell you what, Dor, it will be an uncommonly ugly business if Duke is up to any double-dealing. Hermione is the last woman likely to stand being played with."

"I tell you he is not up to any double-dealing !" cried his wife, indignantly. "I believe Ione knows all about it."

This was a rash assertion she felt drawn from her on the spur of the moment, but, once said, she almost believed it herself ; and there had been something so still, so assured in the calmness of Hermione's manner, that now, in recollecting it, she almost started ; but her belief was rudely dashed aside by Sir Philip's next words.

"I tell you, Dor, that's impossible, for I questioned her myself on the subject; she knows nothing!"

"You did!" gasped Lady Clinton, almost breathless, at such audacity on the part of the usually quiescent Sir Philip.

"Yes, I did."

"What did she say?"

"Oh, cut me very short, I can tell you, by saying she had no knowledge of any of Colonel Myddleton's movements and less right to inquire into them. She is a proud, cold creature!"

"She is a darling!" answered Dorothy. "No one will ever know how good and unselfish and noble she is. She is too good for any *man* to understand!"

Sir Philip laughed, and there the conference ended. In his heart her host had an immense respect and admiration for Hermione, but his nature was completely inadequate to grasping the quiet intensity and force of her character. Her stillness and silence in general society puzzled him, indeed, a little bored him. He felt at a loss what topics to start, not having many at command for ordinary talk but dogs and horses, and though he knew she was extremely fond of both quadrupeds, and rode "stunningly," still he was quite aware, even instinctively, that Hermione was not a person with whom he could or would choose to discuss their respective points. She was the stamp of woman who always remains an enigma to a man of his mental calibre, all the more so that he was drawn

towards her and won by her beauty, gentleness, and kindliness of thought and speech, as much as by the perception of her extreme truth and strength of heart and mind. Why she should be so quiet and reserved, he could not fathom. Probably he came to the conclusion that "she thought the more," and this served to alienate, and to a certain degree terrify him, so to speak.

Hermione was so little self-conscious, that it never entered her mind to question the effect her manner or words would have on others, unless she were essentially anxious to produce some given effect ; it may be that this unconsciousness rather enhanced than otherwise the general impression of her force of character. She had been much shaken by the discussion with Quarl, and it had required all her strength of control to say even the few words she had, with quiet evenness of intonation. Hours afterwards, when Gladys had forgotten the whole subject well-nigh, and even Lady Clinton was beginning to think that she herself had been over anxious about its effect on the principal characters, Hermione was still trembling inwardly, and had a curious, faint feeling round her heart : it was reaction. They had exercised no constraint, whereas Hermione had held down her far deeper and passionate nature with a force that now, in reaction, shook her inwardly to pain. It was not only the scene with Quarl, it was Colonel Myddleton's manner and tone of voice that had moved her so deeply.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

THEY all met at dinner as though nothing more than usual had occurred. Perhaps Quarl was a little more taciturn than usual, Colonel Myddleton a little less so.

Mina was radiantly happy; Sir Vere had brought her down some really beautiful emerald and diamond ornaments, set much in the same style as those of Lady Clinton's, that she had worn in the tableaux, and after which she had never ceased to yearn. Like a child, she put them all on for dinner that very evening, and she looked most fairy-like and odd, glittering almost like a Christmas-tree. She was in wild spirits, coming and standing before each of them in turn and showing herself off. Gladys was lost in admiration of the jewels, and said enough about them to satisfy even their possessor. Hermione thought of the magnificent parures Mark had left her, and smiled at Mina's joy over these.

Sir Vere and Lady Dunstable looked on well pleased, and the old lady began to think that the



marriage of wisdom would suit her little niece better than the *grande passion*. She would have what she really wanted—a husband old enough to adore her pretty caprices, be proud of her youth and girliness, and quite ready to spoil her by indulging her little whims to her heart's content. He would give her a title, which she had always said she wished, and as he was very fond of society and moving about, there was no fear that they would settle down into a dull uniformity of life, which might have proved dangerous to their domestic peace. Ah, yes! Mina had known what she wanted, and had got it. After all, to get comfortably and wisely through this very extraordinary world, it was as well to have but an ordinary character and ordinary requirements, and if you married at all, to marry on something substantive and positive. It is true, she herself had married Sir George at sixteen, in the fullest, deepest tide of love, without counting cost or the flight of time, and she had grown only to love him more and more dearly, but then he had not lived to grow old; and who knew whether the love of sixteen could have stood the test of a husband of sixty? Probably not, and, therefore, it was as well that Mina had not followed her foolish example, but had married because her head was convinced that it was the best thing to do.

“Your heart will often follow your head,” said this wise old lady, “but your head will rarely, if ever, follow your heart; for the one expands in proportion

to its beating, and the other contracts in proportion to your thoughts." What an anatomist would have said to this theory remains an unanswered mystery; but as Lady Dunstable was quite convinced of her own acuteness on this subject, no man had ever been found wise enough to confound her.

Hermione had had much questioning to undergo about Robert from Lady Dunstable, who took as great an interest in him as ever, and she had been able to give most satisfactory answers about his capabilities and attention to business. Indeed, she was convinced no agent had ever been so good or so assiduous—the estate was getting into capital order, though slowly of course; the tenants were happy and contented; the dear old house was growing brighter every day; and deeper and deeper was growing her love for the place and all belonging to it. She was doing up the old stewardry for him, and laying out a garden, and she hoped when General Watt could come and settle in that he would kindly undertake to be ranger-in-chief. She could not say how grateful she was to Lady Dunstable for having ever thought of Robert Watt, and she only hoped that he would live all his life at Enderby, and become one of her closest and best friends.

"Yes, there is something very thorough about that boy," said the old lady. "He has the making of a fine man, but he is very incomplete; he will have to marry," and she looked up gravely.

"I trust he will," answered Hermione, "and that his wife may be dear to me. I would do all I could to make her happy."

"Do you know her, then?"

Hermione looked up, slightly startled. "Do I——?" She paused.

The old lady smiled a little sadly. "You know as much as I do," she answered, softly; "you must know that he loves that pretty child of the Fairfaxes."

Hermione bowed her head.

"Well?" said Lady Dunstable.

"I don't quite know what you wish me to say," said Miss St. John.

"Have you seen her lately?"

"This time, do you mean? No; I meant to go there to-morrow, after church."

"You know she has been ill, do you not?"

"Yes, so I heard, but I suppose—I hope she is quite strong again now."

"After you have seen her, you shall tell me what you think."

Hermione was startled and alarmed by Lady Dunstable's manner, but she could not say much more, for the party broke into general conversation. She sat unspoken to, directly, and she thought over many things that heretofore had puzzled her. If Josline were so ill, or at least so far from being strong as old Lady Dunstable implied, this would, of course, at once account for Robert's extreme depression. She coloured

deeply, thinking over the money she had lodged at his bankers' ; and yet, indirectly, that had helped him—it had brought back Redskin and given him great pleasure and healthful recreation.

How was it that she had not more seriously apprehended Josline's state of health? Gladys had not said anything about its being so seriously affected; but then Gladys was a mere child. Lady Clinton had said nothing, either, but probably she did not know—she and Miss Barbara were never very friendly or communicative. How did Lady Dunstable know? Possibly through Mr. Crosbie; he had dined at Charteriss the previous evening. It did seem strange that she should not have known. How terribly sad for those two poor people if anything should happen to their one darling and treasure! She would certainly go to-morrow and see them; Miss Barbara had been most benign to her, and she didn't feel in the least alarmed at the prospect of meeting that austere person. Perhaps, indefinitely to herself, even, she was conscious of her strong attraction for Miss Barbara; and she felt a deep interest in Josline, like herself, motherless and fatherless, though not so utterly bereft of near relations.

Colonel Myddleton had not talked much to Hermione during their stay; he was watching her now, and as the melancholy look deepened on her face, he could not refrain from wondering whether she was thinking about her dead cousin. He crossed the room

and sat down by her. She looked up, smiling faintly and moved her dress, on which Jerks was lying.

"You look very tired," he said, in a low voice.

"Do I? I am not, though; I was thinking of lonely people."

He gave a slight start. "Do you feel lonely?" he said.

"No, I wasn't thinking of feeling lonely, I was thinking of being so."

"Then you couldn't have been thinking of yourself, were you?" he said, in a tone of relief.

"Well, do you know, I was, but not sorrowfully," she added, hastily, as she saw a look of pain come over his face. "I was thinking, first of all, about poor little Josline Fairfax, who is still so very delicate, Lady Dunstable tells me, and then, I don't know how, I wandered into thinking that in some ways we are alike—I mean our lives. We neither of us have father or mother, and I, at least, no very near relations alive."

He made no answer, and she folded her handkerchief backwards and forwards without looking up. Suddenly he made a movement, and she raised her eyes. He was excessively pale; his eyes were fixed on her face. Something made her say hurriedly—

"It wasn't that I was unhappy, *really*, I was only thinking of it as a fact."

He moved uneasily. "Do you often think of it?"

"No, I don't know that I ever thought so very

much about it before. It was realizing how much I had in my power—I mean how much I am responsible for now my cousin is dead ; and yet responsible to whom ? ” She paused. “ To no one on earth—only God.”

“ Do you always find it possible to decide what is best for those who—who may be responsible to you ? ”

“ I try.”

“ And do you act for them according to what you think best, without reference to their feelings or your own.”

“ No, not quite ; if I did I should decide wrongly. I think there is a relative rightness and wrongness about some things.”

“ You mean that a course of action might be right for me and wrong for you ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Then how would you decide if—— ”

Just then Mina Thorold began singing. Every voice was hushed, and Colonel Myddleton got up and walked away.

There was no more separate conversation that night, nor did Colonel Myddleton seek an opportunity of again approaching the subject. What had he been going to say ? Hermione wondered for many days. If Mina had not begun to sing then he must have finished the sentence, at least ; as it was, that “ if ” haunted Hermione like a half-hooded face in a dream.



## CHAPTER XIX.

MR. FAIRFAX was walking slowly up and down the lawn at Old Court, with his arms behind him and his hands linked. His grave, severe head was bent forward, and, unlike his usual habit, his lips were apart, without softly humming some favourite air. He stopped now in front of the old garden seat, and passed one slender nervous finger softly over the old carving on the seat. "*Fleur de ma vie et de mon amour,*" he murmured. "Ah! yes, how true! And here we often sat, and I watched her heart break in that silence which is more awful than regret outspoken. Ah! poor love, poor love!" He linked his hands again and went on walking. "And is it possible that I could once have been willing to forswear my very faith for her love? Well, so I suppose; and as the child says: 'It was all right to me, because I loved her so.'"

He went on again, going towards the nut walk, down which path he, Mr. Crosbie, Robert, and Josline



had walked one evening. He was thinking of her now as he strolled slowly on. He could not recover from the shock her last conversation had given him. Ever since the evening when, walking home over the uplands, she had tried to tell him something and failed, he had held in his heart a secret anxiety regarding her. He felt convinced that something serious weighed her down, and prevented her rallying from this present attack.

At first he had half hoped, half dreaded it might be an unacknowledged attachment to Robert Watt, and he had comforted himself by reflecting that young Mr. Watt was only waiting to feel assured of his position and income to come forward. But since the last conversation with her, he knew he had been wrong in his conjecture; her words about a promise to be kept held no meaning as applied to Robert, they could but be in connection with her childhood and her mother. And yet, Josline had been so young when she lost her, that surely a promise given then could hardly have retained any power over her now, through all this lapse of time. Or, was it possible, with a nature like Josline's, that instead of an impression weakening it deepened with years? Yes, he felt convinced it was so, she "was wax to receive, and adamant to retain;" with all her gentleness of character she had a tenacity of mind that equalled her fragility of body; once having received an impression and made it her own, it became, indeed, one

with her life—a rare combination of earnestness and pliability, that gave the severe sweetness to her face he so loved.

What could this promise be? he could not even faintly surmise. That it was a great anxiety, a solemn weight on her mind, now, he sorrowfully acknowledged to himself; and with a slight shudder he recollected the look of almost agonized relief that had come over her face when she had said: “Would it make any difference her not having known the value of her promise?” the wonderful glory of happiness that had illumined her eyes, and then as suddenly died down on his response. “Oh! my child, my darling!” he thought, “what can it be? Will even to you, so pure and holy a creature, descend the curse pronounced on the children of the wicked?” He was to know, she had said, one day, and he would not mind “because he loved her so,” meaning her mother. “Oh, Jack, Jack!” he thought again; “if you had but thought of your innocent child!”

The bells were ringing for church now. He turned on his heel, hearing the sound of various locks, and knowing that Miss Barbara was going her rounds preparatory to going to church.

He paused near the tiger-lily bed, in all its glory of colour, thinking how beautifully the pearly, “rumbling” doves contrasted with its brilliancy. They were preening themselves now and wheeling. Presently, as by one accord, they rose in the air and flew towards

the gable of Josline's window, and, looking up, he saw her sitting there, smiling down on him. He looked at her, smiling in return, silently. And in a while she cast him down an exquisite noisette rose; it fell softly at his feet, and, lifting it, he fastened it in his coat.

"I wish you were coming, Anima," he said, wistfully.

He could not hear her answer, it died on the air, but he saw her lips move. Her hand remained on the sill, looking like a beautifully veined bell-flower. He saw sparkling on it the ring she always wore—her mother's, the ring with the ruby heart and diamond coronet.

"Fiel pero desdichado,"\* he murmured. "Alas! my child. What cruel fate wove that motto round your mother's heart so closely, that she should have it engraved in her betrothal ring, and put it on your finger with her last strength?"

How well he remembered that last scene: the dying mother gasping her life away; the little child, so grave, so all-comprehending the incomprehensible, kneeling on the bed, drawn within the convulsive clasp of the mother's slender arms. The wonderful strength that, at the last, drawing the ring from the wasted finger and pressing it on the child's small hand, had enabled Mrs. Fairfax to gasp out, sighingly, "Remember!" and then turning to him to add, "Dux will help!" He had thought, then, she alluded to the

\* "Faithful though unhappy."

memory of her love, but now he judged differently. "Dux will help!" Those simple words rang back to him with a terrible significance; the perfect trust of their intonation still held full sway over his mind and memory. Trying to carry out their appeal from the beginning, he had "helped," by loving the child devotedly, patiently, and expansively. He had never been too absorbed in his music or studies to turn with a loving smile to the sweet-voiced little girl. If Miss Barbara had been stern, he had been most tender, and, as in giving the love, its power over the giver had waxed mighty, so now there was nothing in the whole world to him that could compete with the affection he felt for Josline. She was the very life of his life. And it seemed as though his life were going from him silently day by day, and he had not only no means of preventing its going, but no means to help it on its long journey. Alas! our love is so heavenly strong, so earthly weak!

Now, on this gloriously beautiful summer's day, his darling lay within the verge of the great shadow—her feet had already turned in the direction of the silent land.

The bells began tolling. Miss Barbara came from the side door, enveloped in black satin mantle and hood, and holding, on one finger, the key of the porch.

With a sigh he turned away and, joined by his sister, they went along the nut-walk to church. They

were both silent for some little time, and then Miss Barbara said, in a harsh, short voice, that yet had a kind of thrill in it—

“Dux, that child gets no stronger; would it be worth while to have further advice?”

“Has Crosbie been saying anything to you, Barbara?”

“Mr. Crosbie! No. Turgoose says she won’t take any more herbal tea.”

“I wonder whether change would do her good?”

“You spoke of that once before, and I wouldn’t hear of it, but I think now it might, perhaps, be thought of, you see,” pursued Miss Barbara, with strange hesitancy and colour. “I think as Miss St. John has come to Charteriss she *might* offer to take Josline back with her to Enderby, and if she did, why——”

In spite of the bell tolling more and more slowly Mr. Fairfax stopped, looked full in his sister’s face, and then said, “Barbara, what do you mean?”

Miss Barbara had stopped, too; she looked a little angry and flurried. “You need not insinuate, Dux, it’s not manly, if I have a predilection for Miss St. John, that is no reason to look so.”

“I didn’t mean to look insinuating,” said her brother, with a curious smile of relief, most thankful to find his thoughts had taken a wrong direction. “Or if I did, it could only have been to show you how highly I think of Miss St. John.” He resumed his

walk, saying, meekly, "But why do you think Miss St. John would like to have the child?"

"Because she once said as much to me, and I have the highest opinion of Miss St. John—the very highest. She is so immensely rich that it would make no sort of difference to her, except, in so far that she would gain by having the young thing with her."

"And our loss," murmured Dux, with a compression of heart.

"Now that *is* unmanly," quoth Miss Barbara. "But men never think of others."

"Oh!"

The bell ceased, and they entered their pew with a little more haste than usual.

During the sermon, Mr. Fairfax sat facing Hudson's picture, gazing in apparent devotion, but lost in thought as to whether Miss St. John would ask Josline; if so, whether Josline would go; if so, whether Robert Watt would speak; if so, whether Josline would accept him; if so, what they should do without her.



## CHAPTER XX.

HERMIONE was in the conservatory, dressed for church. She was waiting for all the others, and wandering up and down the small paths, looking for some jessamine to wear, for it was one of her pet fancies to wear a flower in going to church, and amongst all the choice plants and exotics around her, she liked most the delicate, starry jessamine. However, there was none within reach, and after many fruitless springs mid-air, she had gathered a bud, just opening, of eucharis, and was fastening it in her dress, when the glass doors giving on the long covered corridor leading to the house clanged hastily, and she saw Quarl come hurriedly up the centre path.

They had not spoken to each other since the fracas, and she fully expected him to pass her now. She bore no malice, though she had disliked him for his apparent dislike for, and unmanly attack on, Colonel Myddleton.

The strange Quarl now approached her hurriedly,



and said, "Miss St. John, I beg your pardon. I never can speak to you alone. I wanted to explain to you——"

Hermione stopped him by lifting her hand, quietly, looking him full in the face and saying, gently but firmly, "I think the less we either of us say about anything that is past, the better, Mr. Freeman. I dare say you spoke without premeditation, and I answered too severely." She felt she could not bear to hear Colonel Myddleton's conduct discussed by Quarl.

"It is not that at all," he said, with a kind of cold fury, that startled her. "You are all misled about that man. I——"

"Mr. Freeman, be silent!" said Hermione, with a haughty severity that checked him. "I decline to listen to a word you may have to say with regard to any one."

She turned round and joined Lady Clinton, who had come in at that moment.

Quarl stood where she had left him, his face white and drawn, and then, with a scornful whistle, he turned on his heel.

"Ione, talking alone to the enemy? Wonderful, and still more wonderful!"

Hermione was quivering with anger and a slight sensation of fear, but she smiled and said, "I really think some people cannot resist showing the cloven foot."

"Well, Quarl certainly has something Mephisto-

phelian about him now and then. I saw him come flying along in here just now, but I didn't know you were here, too, or otherwise I would have come to the rescue."

Hermione shuddered slightly, and said, "I do hope I shan't be alone with him any more."

The rest came in now, and they walked off to church by the hollow way, in the shade. It was not till half-way through the service that Hermione noticed that she had lost the eucharis.

"I suppose Mr. Freeman has travelled too much to come to church?" said Lady Dunstable to Sir Philip, on their way there.

"He doesn't often come, he says it bores him," answered her host, offering his arm to the old lady. "Now, I consider we've great luck in having Crosbie, he is so large-minded and short-winded that any one can sit through his sermons."

"I should think Freeman had his own ideas on religious subjects, strongly developed in a comfortable creed that what made you most easy in body would most promote the welfare of your soul," Sir Vere remarked.

"I know he admires Liddon's works very much," put in Lady Clinton. "And he once left Rénan behind him," she added, with innocent pleasure in adding what she thought was a kindly word in favour of the absentee.

"Liddon is magnificent, when you can follow

him," said Colonel Myddleton, quietly, "and would exactly suit Freeman's range of thought, I should imagine; for with all his crotchets on religious subjects, he has a very deep conviction on certain points—Freeman I mean, not Liddon," he added, to Lady Clinton.

"Yes, and *Réнан*! the '*Vie de Jèsu*!' that must be beautiful," answered Lady Clinton, who on reading the title of the book brought to her, and seeing it was French, had never even opened it, but forwarded it at once to its possessor, not caring for French books on religious subjects.

"I don't think you would care for it, or like it," said Colonel Myddleton, with a grave smile.

"Shouldn't I? I was wishing I had read it."

"If you would care for that sort of work, I should advise you to read '*Ecce Homo*,' one of the divinest books ever published."

"Oh! I have been told it was desperately bad and so unorthodox."

"What did your advisers mean by unorthodox?" said Colonel Myddleton, quietly.

"Well, I really don't know," answered Lady Clinton, looking up frankly in his face.

"Nor they either, probably. The next time any one uses that expression to you, beg them to define what they mean. And in the mean while read '*Ecce Homo*.'"

"Religious books make me uncomfortable. If you

read a little bit you feel so wicked for not always reading them, and doing all sorts of things that are tiresome," said Gladys.

"Religious books make me go to sleep; I like them after luncheon," said Mina.

Hermione walked on in silence, her surroundings were not, somehow, quite congenial; she had been so ruffled by Quarl's manner that she could not regain her usual frame of mind. Her state would have been obvious to any one who knew her moods perfectly, not otherwise. She had not attempted to put on her gloves; they had somehow become rolled into a stiff ball, and were tucked in the hollow of one arm, whilst the thumb of the right hand was caught in the front of her dress, and held it from her chest, as though she wanted air and freedom.

Colonel Myddleton watched the slight, erect figure, walking steadily and unswervingly on in front, and little dreamed how tossed and weary her mind was with conjectures about him. Gradually her pace increased, as it always did when she was thinking deeply, and she, and Gladys brought nearly into a run, had to wait for the rest in the porch.

The Fairfaxes, in their quaint pew, saw the Charteriss party go into their great oak box under the tomb, and Miss Barbara stood even more erect than usual during the psalms, in the knowledge that Hermione was in church, and felt a curious tingling of excitement all through the sermon.

When the service was over, they all met at the lych gate, and Hermione and Gladys asked to be allowed to walk home with the Fairfaxes. Miss Barbara, in a state of ecstatic inward delight, answered that if Miss St. John thought of doing so foolish a thing as walking round by Old Court on this hot day she would be very welcome to come in and rest. Colonel Myddleton looked wistfully after the retreating figure, and Hermione turning into the garden gate caught his eye, and for some unknown reason blushed crimson. Lady Clinton saw the look, and turning to Colonel Myddleton, she said—

“I wish you would do me a kindness?”

“I shall be delighted,” he said.

“Would you mind going with those headstrong creatures, Hermione and Gladys, and trying to induce them to walk home by the fir wood and river?”

“I will, certainly, if you think the Fairfaxes won't mind.”

“No, I am sure not, and I see you have your umbrella, *do* hold it over them in the sun, they are so reckless, and I'll put off luncheon till half-past two. Or no, stay; you three shall have it in the morning-room, cool and comfortably yourselves, so don't hurry.”

Just as they reached the porch and Miss Barbara drew from her velvet bag the huge key, Colonel Myddleton overtook them, and was on the whole favourably received, a good deal of quiet laughter being provoked by his instructions.

They all went into the cedar parlour, where the delighted "person of the house" met them with much meawing, and presently attached herself to Colonel Myddleton.

Miss Barbara was in much perturbation on the score of the wrong and right squares, but, it being Sunday, she consoled herself by thinking that one day in seven did not matter so much, and besides, it was nearly as good as going to church after a heavy dinner and trying to keep awake, to endure the pain of seeing the wrong squares ruthlessly trodden on. Only once did her equanimity desert her when Colonel Myddleton, in pulling forward his chair, planted all four delicately twisted legs on four pale blue squares. They were her favourites.

"Do move your chair a little, *please!*" she said, in such a voice of alarm, that he rose, and she got up and put it against the wall again.

He concluded that the legs were unsafe, and sat down on another.

Josline roused up into more life than Miss Barbara had seen her evince for long, when Hermione went up to see her.

"All for novelty!" said her aunt, rather sharply; but she laid her hand gently on Josline's shoulder when Miss St. John said—

"Yes, how tired you must be of always being up here! Any one coming in fresh makes a difference, doesn't it? And then how glad you must be to be quiet again!"



Josline smiled. She knew exactly what Miss St. John meant.

Hermione sat and talked for some little time, telling her all about Enderby, as she said she fancied anything quite fresh would amuse her. Over and over again, she brought in Robert's name, till the exquisite flush deepened and settled on the wan cheeks. As she went on talking about the old house, and the beautiful wild park, and the great cedars, and the cool wash of the river, the clear, longing look of the young girl's eyes brightened, and once or twice she half lifted her small hand with a half-suppressed pant of excitement. And as Hermione talked on, a purpose defined itself in her heart ; she longed to take Josline back with her, to try the effect of the bright, breezy, wild forest air in the park, the rowing and boating on the broad, gleaming river ; perhaps, even a quiet ride or two on her own perfectly trained Falcon. Above all, she longed to try the effect of a little expressed outward love, to take Josline away from this silent, moss-grown house, with the shaded garden, and the constant melancholy sound of the church bell, to take her away from the acid wearing of Miss Barbara's tongue, and small rough ways of being made to do this, that, and the other. She longed to try the effect of transplanting this delicate, to her dying girl, and taking her into warmth, love, freedom. It would be the more feasible, as by the time she returned Robert would be living at the stewardry, and only come in to



dinner; and if she went back rather before the time she had fixed, Josline would have time to be quiet and alone with her for a little, before the rush of guests came for the "house-warming." She would not say anything yet; she would come to Old Court as often as she could, and try to win Josline to care for her enough to go with her. She knew Miss Barbara liked her, and she hoped by degrees to win her and Mr. Fairfax round; at the utmost she would get Mr. Crosbie to intercede. She little knew that he had already paved the way with Miss Barbara.

Just as they were going out of the room, and Miss Barbara preceded her to show her the way down the curious little flight of five steps, she turned back, and bending over Josline, who lay back now in the chair, looking faint and wan and wistful, she took the two delicate hands, and said, softly—

"Shall I come again?"

Perhaps Josline's exquisitely poised nature guessed, though dimly to her consciousness, the eventual leading of these simple words. Her face lit up with a beautiful sweetness.

"Yes," she said; and involuntarily, as though to a child, Hermione, who was ordinarily so undemonstrative, bent and just brushed the delicate forehead with her lips, carrying away in her heart the solemn gladness of those deep eyes.

Downstairs they found Mr. Crosbie, who always came to Old Court between the services on Sundays,

a practice begun years ago, when he had come to catechise his godchild. He was in one of his jocose moods to-day, and bent on teasing Gladys, who, being very hot, was not much in a lively state of mind.

"Well, what do you think of that little one upstairs, Miss St. John?" he said, in a very different tone.

"She looks very delicate," said Hermione, gravely. "Perhaps a little change might be good for her, or, do you think not, Miss Fairfax?" turning pointedly to Miss Barbara, who, she felt convinced, must be addressed first.

"Well, Mr. Crosbie thinks so, too, and I dare say it might be a good thing," but this answer was given in such a constrained voice, that Hermione felt further remark on the subject at that moment would be unwise. She therefore asked Mr. Fairfax if she might go into the garden and see the bed of tiger-lilies, which were famous.

Then they went through the den, and there the lily's heart stood in its ebony and tortoise-shell frame. Colonel Myddleton remained looking at it, whilst the others went on into the garden. He had stood quietly for a few moments, when Hermione came quickly in again, and hurried up to the picture.

"Oh!" she said, in a quivering voice, "I see now how dreadfully she is changed, poor, poor child!"

Before he could answer, she had brushed hastily

past him into the hall, and re-appeared with her gloves in her hand, as Miss Barbara stood on the window-sill.

“Have you found them?” said Miss Fairfax.

“Yes; I stupidly dropped them,” she said, smiling brightly; but Colonel Myddleton remarked that her eyes were full of unshed tears.

Mr. Fairfax gathered a lovely bunch of noisette roses and lilies, and Miss Barbara cut whole branches of jessamine, and at length they departed, laden with flowers.

“May I come again, soon?” said Miss St. John, as they stood together at the gate.

Both Miss Barbara and her brother begged her to do so.

“Phœbe, look! those are *real* gentlefolk,” said Mrs. Turgoose; and Phœbe made up her mind that *real* gentlefolk always carried scarlet prayer-books.

“There, Dux, I told you so!” said Miss Barbara, triumphantly. “I knew Miss St. John would ask Josline to go to her.”

“My dear! she said nothing about doing so,” answered the uncle in surprise.

“Oh, Dux! you are so obtuse! Of course, that was what she meant by what she did say, only I should think she is a person who thinks carefully over things, and I don’t want her to have our child too easily. The obligation is to be equal.”

Mr. Fairfax smiled silently, and then went up to

Josline. He sat down by her, and she, as usual, leant her head against his shoulder. After a little while, he said—

“Do you like Miss St. John, Anima?”

“Yes. Do you?” and she stroked his hand, lying in her own.

“I think she likes you,” he answered, kindly;  
“so I am sure I like her.”

## CHAPTER XXI.

THEY were a very silent quartette on the homeward way, for Mr. Crosbie had said he would go a short distance with them, to put them in the right path. He took them the way Josline and Gabriel had gone the day of the storm; they did not know it, but he remembered every incident of the road, graphically as Josline had afterwards described it to him. He had meant to cross-question Miss St. John about his godchild; but now, in the immediate scene of the cause of her illness, his heart sank, and, finding no words, he walked silently onwards. Gladys was hot and tired, and disinclined to talk. Colonel Myddleton was wondering why Hermione should have been so moved at sight of the picture. Hermione was thinking over her farewell interview with Colonel Myddleton nearly a year ago. Why? Ah! that was a question she would have been the least able to answer.

When they reached the pine wood, Mr. Crosbie said, suddenly—

"Now, I wonder what we were all thinking of? Supposing we really say!"

"I am sure Hermione is tired," said Gladys.

"I was thinking of the picture of Miss Fairfax," said Colonel Myddleton.

"I was thinking of Josline herself," said Mr. Crosbie.

Hermione looked up quickly, and said, "Mine was the only selfish thought, but I can't say it."

"Life is very monotonous," said Mr. Crosbie, frowning horribly. "Now I dare say if Miss St. John had really said what she was thinking of, we might have had a sensation."

"No, I think not, it was too personal," answered Hermione, smiling, then meeting Colonel Myddleton's intense gaze, she added, "Into how few lives enters often what we call sensation—what our grandparents called romance!"

"Would you like sensation in your life? It is sometimes an agonizing thing," he answered, so earnestly, that Mr. Crosbie started.

"No, I suppose not, only I was thinking that if one's life were written out, it would sound very dull and flat to others."

"Oh, no!" said Mr. Crosbie. "Not if really put down hour by hour; the thing is that nobody will be content to publish a *real* life. They 'pad' to such an extent that naturalness is swamped in incident. I am sure I have known lives, very simple ones too, that

had some terrible grief in them, or bar ; and all their lives up to that were a preparation, and all their lives after, a reparation or consolation ; but if you put down the incidents, simple, unstriking, no one would believe you. One always imagines eruptions come with a crash, without any previous grumblings, whereas that is the exception ; as a rule, when a life is going to be burst up as it were, there are unmistakable warnings."

By some unaccountable impulse, Colonel Myddleton's and Hermione's eyes met. His were full of pleading, hers of a kind of terror. They involuntarily diverged from each other's side.

No one made any remark on Mr. Crosbie's speech, and soon after that he quitted them and turned back.

Gladys at least was very glad when they reached Charteriss ; she was hot and tired, and both her companions had been so exceedingly silent, that there had been nothing to divert her thoughts from the effects of the heat.

They were all sitting under the yew in the afternoon, reading or dozing, when Quarl suddenly appeared, carrying Disko. No one moved. Sir Vere said lazily, "Not too hot, Freeman?" to which no response was vouchsafed. But the monkey and its master ensconced themselves in a low garden chair, and began playing tricks on each other. Gradually they all looked up, their eyes caught by the quick, graceful motions of the monkey. Suddenly the little



creature plunged its paw into Quarl's waistcoat pocket, and drawing out something with a grin, flourished it over its head, and then tossed it into Gladys's lap. It was a crushed eucharis blossom.

"What a horrid crushed flower!" said Gladys, shaking it off her delicate dress.

Freeman, with a strident laugh, made a snatch at it, and crushing it together with a violence that spoke of concentrated rage, flung it far away.

Hermione, Sir Philip, and Colonel Myddleton alone noticed the blossom.

"Halloa!" said the host, good-humouredly. "I beg, Quarl, you won't let that brute steal my best flowers."

"Certainly not," answered he, rapidly, "he picks up the bits, it's only ladies who are ruthless to choice specimens."

Sir Philip felt his wife pinch him, so by way of making matters better, he added, "Well, all I can say is they've very good taste, then. Think of Dorothy and me! I could find it in my heart to wish somebody would pick you, Quarl."

"Pick me a quarrel? Well, I'm quite ready," answered Mr. Freeman, with a mirthless cackle. "If people leave rubbish about, I'm generally in the way to clear it off, and old scores, too."

Here the servants brought out tea and chocolate, and a general divergence of topics ensued with a change of places.

But three people thought over the eucharis blossom.

## CHAPTER XXI.

LADY DUNSTABLE was very anxious to know what Hermione thought of Josline, and the account given grieved her very much. She was most anxious to see her herself, but, on inquiring about Miss Barbara, was so alarmed at the universal description of her oddity, that she declared she dared not face her. That sort of person always gave her a *migraine*, she averred, from the fact of its being necessary to be constantly on one's guard for fear of encountering a storm. Still, she yearned to see the girl too, the only child of Lucille's only friend. She wondered audibly why it was that Mina and Josline had not made friends—not so very surprising considering they had only met once, and that the night of the tableaux; still, the old lady maintained that in the fitness of circumstances they should have been friends, as their mothers had been. Mina! little, flighty, superficial Mina, care for or in the least understand the dreamy, silent, intensely introspective nature of Josline? No, of course not; but still, it

should have been so. They only wanted opportunity, she maintained. Perhaps so, since what more do any of us want to become all we would ?

Miss St. John and Quarl appeared to avoid each other tacitly ; indeed, on his side the strange man avoided every one more or less. He appeared, however, to be keeping a keen watch on Colonel Myddleton's doings and sayings ; if, by any possible chance, he could pick a hole in any speech or action of the latter, it was quickly wrested, torn to atoms, and held up to obliquy or derision. How often Hermione writhed under his withering sarcasm before that visit came to an end ; but Colonel Myddleton himself seemed unaware of giving or receiving offence. He was as quiet and silent when any theory he might happen to advance was ruthlessly demolished, as though it had been expanded and admired. Was it that he really did not care sufficiently for anything to contend ? or was it that he actually did not feel the treatment it received ? He appeared to Miss St. John as a man in a dream ; the only accidents that seemed to affect him were the arrival of the post or the sudden opening of a door.

Gladys had showed her the disfigured picture. Lady Clinton was anxious it should remain as it was, with a placard attached to it, stating how it had been injured, but it was far enough finished for the portraits to be really valuable, and Sir Philip intended having it as much as possible "set to rights," as he

termed it, by some good picture restorer. At present it stood on an easel in the great gallery. Fortunately, the faces had not been struck by the mahl-stick, and it was quite possible to render it almost invisibly perfect, by dint of fresh backing the canvas.

Hermione walked down or drove to Old Court almost daily. She was growing intensely anxious about Josline Fairfax, and the fascination seemed mutual. Day by day Miss St. John thought she would ask her to come with her, and day by day she postponed so doing from some unacknowledged terror of bringing things to a climax. Still, she must decide soon, for Robert wrote word that the house was now ready for her personal superintendence, and there were finishing orders she knew none but herself could give; he had gone down to the stewardry, and Mrs. Match was anxiously awaiting her casting vote as to arrangement of furniture and pictures.

She walked up and down the hornbeam avenue in the dusk, wondering to herself why she so dreaded going back to the Enderby she loved. It seemed so strange and sad that she should be expending all this wealth, thought, and care on no behoof but her own; for though she could and fully intended to ask many to come to the "house-warming," though she knew it would give employment to many and pleasure and interest to many more, still it was only temporary to those others; for herself alone would any permanent good or glory last. Yes, the more she thought of it,

the more lonely did it seem, with a dreary, awful loneliness.

The house was fuller than usual, there were several guests of "high degree" arriving for the ceremony of the foundation the following day, and to escape the bustle in the tea-room, she had wandered out here. She walked up and down now, musing over many things, when a man's figure came to the entrance of the conservatory, watched her for a little while, and then joined her with rapid steps. It was Colonel Myddleton. He came straight up to her, and something in his face made her heart stop beating.

He began speaking in a low, hurried way, very unlike his usual clearness and quietude.

"Miss St. John, I have long wanted to meet you alone. I may be summoned at any minute, I may have to leave this before I can give you any explanation. I want to ask you something, honestly, face to face; will you answer me now, once and for ever?"

She put out one hand, speechlessly. Then it was come at last, thank God! The great awful gladness of her eyes smote him like a naked sword. It could only be one thing he was going to explain. The triumphant beating of her heart nearly choked her.

"It is a long story," he said, as low and quick as footsteps in the dark. "I will begin at the beginning. For God's sake, don't look at me like that, though! it unnerves me, and—— What! did you never see the way one lights a cigar? oh! it's very simple, see."

He drew a fusee from his pocket, struck it, and began deliberately to light one. The frightful pallor of his face alone betrayed him, as Hermione stood speechless and rigid as stone on seeing Quarl come sauntering slowly towards them from a side avenue. Before he was quite within hearing, Colonel Myddleton said, puffing slowly and drawing, "I will write." Then, "There! now you have seen how neat it is; don't you think so?"

"Very," said Hermione. Further speech was drowned by the dressing-bell, and she returned to re-enter the house.

Quarl had followed Colonel Myddleton from the house, knowing Hermione was in the avenue; he had prevented any conversation, but he had heard nothing. He looked intently in her face as she passed him now, and she looked coldly and calmly in his. She could have done nothing else, for she was paralyzed by suppressed feeling, but her manner could not have been more perfectly poised as regarded its power of baffling him. He whistled softly to himself, hugging his familiar ape the while.

Colonel Myddleton was standing sideways to him, still struggling with his refractory cigar. His agitated breathing refused to coax it into livelihood, and at last he threw it impatiently down, and then, turning to Quarl, he said something about the damp, and wondered that Disko never appeared to suffer at all from the climate. His manner was so perfectly at ease



that Mr. Freeman was baffled again, though instinctively certain that his arrival had put an end to some scene of explanation, which he (Quarl) was determined should never come off.

Colonel Myddleton was perfectly aware that this was his intention, but with all his characteristic quietude and coolness, had been equally determined nothing should be either lost or won. Anyhow, the gates were open ; if he wrote now he felt certain that Hermione would read and weigh ; and, indeed, he must write, he must explain. He would far rather speak ; how well he knew the force of words, even broken, half-choked syllables, in comparison to stiff, black letters ! He would wait a little and see if by any chance he could speak, but also he would have a written statement ready in case he were summoned suddenly, for he determined that if such should be the case before he could speak, he would not leave her again unknowing. That glorious look of joy and trust in her eyes had cut him to the quick, for, alas ! it told him more than Hermione knew, it told him *all* ; but she was avenged. If she could have seen him sitting up hour after hour all through that night, writing rapidly as fire runs, with his chest heaving, and his brow wet with the perspiration of remorse and renunciation, I think even Hermione, the proud, self-contained Hermione, would have felt avenged.

When Hermione came down, the drawing-room was full of guests, and she went into dinner with the



same Lord Edward Morton who had taken her into supper at the tableaux. This night he found her hardly less distracted and strange than the preceding evening of fatal memory, only, happily, the dinner was first-rate, and the various courses were so fascinating, that he found it in his heart to forgive his silent and absent partner.

Hermione watched the different faces keenly. Quarl was nearly opposite; he had taken in Gladys, and was evidently telling her some most amusing stories, for no one could be more amusing than he could, if he liked and wished to be so. Colonel Myddleton was sitting the same side as Hermione, and therefore she could see nothing but his hand at intervals.

Lord Edward's first original remark was, "Awfully jolly girl, Miss Fairfax! just like wax, you know!"

To which Hermione responded, "She is very lovely, certainly. What a pity she is so delicate!"

"Yes; horrid bore!" and then a lapse of dead silence.

Hermione found herself wondering why Colonel Myddleton clenched his hand so tightly over his roll.

"Lord Edward, are you going to the laying of the stone to-morrow?"

"Yes. Will Miss Fairfax be there?"

"I really don't know. No, I am sure she will not."

"Awful bore!" Collapse two.

Desperate rally of forces on both sides—he from

some dish with unpronounceable name, she from the vision of a face bent over a lighting cigar.

"I do hope it will be fine to-morrow," simultaneously.

Miss St. John laughed ; he remained aghast, and pulled his moustache. Hermione rushed in to the conclusion—

"Because, if not, it will go off so badly."

"Awful bore !" Last and final collapse.

The second post came very late at Charteriss. They found their letters on leaving the dining-room. Hermione took her two to a side-table ; they were from Mrs. Match and Robert ; both letters urged her return as soon as possible. Hermione had written to Robert, begging him to come to Charteriss, but he answered, saying he could not leave, and yet did not like carrying out the finishing touches without her sanction and approval. She wondered when she could go back—the day following but one, she thought ; only she wanted to take Josline with her, and it seemed such very short notice. However, if her presence were really so necessary, she must go back, and perhaps the Fairfaxes would, under these circumstances, waive ceremony, and allow her to carry off their niece. The only thing would be to go down there early to-morrow before starting for N——, and try to induce them to give their consent.

And how about Colonel Myddleton ? Well, it would be hard to go and leave matters all mysterious as

they stood, but he had said he would write; and Hermione felt a strong conviction that whilst Quarl was there nothing further would occur. Colonel Myddleton had promised to come for the "house-warming;" that had long been settled, and she did not dream of any circumstances compelling him to break his word.

"Gladys!" she said, softly, as Gladys passed her, carrying a large book of prints, "will you come with me early to-morrow to Old Court?"

"Oh, yes! how delightful!" said Gladys, with a kind of joyful jump.

"May I come, too?" said Mina Thorold.

Hermione looked up, amazed. "What! would you really get up so early?" she said, smiling. "I should have thought you were never down till about eleven o'clock."

"Well, I don't know that I am, but I get up at nine."

"I shall be ready if you are," said Hermione, "but I—can't wait."

Later on in the evening, Mr. Freeman came and sat down by her. At first he was quite silent. She made no remark, for she was extremely vexed at his having come near her; she began to fear him unreasonably, and to think of him in the light of some weird and irresistible fate.

At last, when music was going on, he turned his sardonic face to her and said, "Are you not going to have a grand 'house-warming,' Miss St. John, soon?"

"I don't know what you might call 'grand,'" she said, trying to smile, because her heart beat thickly, and seeing, as in a nightmare vision, the terrible Quarl at lonely Enderby. "When the house is finished, as was originally planned, I am going to give a feast to the tenants, and a ball to as many of the neighbours who will kindly come the great distance most of them live from there."

"I suppose they are all coming from here?" he said, with an inclusive sweep of his hand.

"They have said they will, at least, those whom I know, but I hardly know eight people in the room to-night."

"Clinton, and his wife, and Miss Gladys, and Colonel Myddleton, four; Lady Dunstable, Miss Thorold, Sir Vere Temple, and—myself, eight," he said, with imperturbable coolness. "How cleverly you hit the number off, Miss St. John, though you hadn't done me the honour to include me in your invitation before!"

This was too much. Hermione turned slowly round, and looked him fully in the face. Her heart beat so thickly and loudly that she fancied he must hear it, and her voice trembled almost beyond control with anger. "I miscalculated, I find," she said, quietly, and in the most icy voice. "I have only asked seven. I beg your pardon for my mistake."

"Oh! it is one so easily rectified," he said, "that I can find no difficulty in granting you absolution; I

shall only be too delighted to make the number even. I know you dislike odd anything."

"I do," she answered, "and, therefore, I am hoping to take Miss Josline Fairfax back with me, and that will make the number exactly what I wish."

She rose in so saying, and walked to the piano. He rose, too, and followed her. ' Would he insist on coming?—a horrible dread nearly overwhelmed her. She turned and looked at him; there was a mocking look on his face, quite fiendish to her imagination.

"You will find your numbers wrong again, Miss St. John; the *Mirzapore* has been signalled."

Some one began singing "Douglas." To her dying day Hermione never knew who, but she was eternally grateful to them, for it saved her from any coherent answer. She sat down close to the piano, though, as a rule, she disliked singing in a drawing-room. She leaned her arm on a low table by her side, and covered her mouth with her hand; it was trembling convulsively, she felt, and she knew, though she did not look, that Quarl was watching her, but yet that only came to her as a bare fact of little or no importance. She thought of nothing impressively, but of his last few words. This, then, was what Colonel Myddleton had meant when he had said he might be summoned suddenly. When a ship was "signalled," it did not mean that she came in immediately, surely, no; but it meant that by the time the party assembled at Enderby Colonel Myddleton might be unable to come,

for by that time he would, in all probability, be in attendance on the mysterious "friend," who was coming back from India, and for whose arrival he was now waiting at Charteriss to be summoned.

This suspense was agonizing, the mystery almost more than she could bear. The voice went on singing, "Could ye come back to me, Douglas, Douglas, in the old likeness that I knew," and then, further on in the song, "Mine eyes were blinded, your words were few." Hermione curled her small foot tightly together in the delicate satin shoe, and set her teeth hard; it was a blinding struggle to keep back the hot, aching, miserable tears. Somehow, his few words that evening in the avenue had utterly unnerved her; light had seemed coming so surely, so gladly, and now further than ever seemed anything save the outer darkness of blank unknowingness. And yet, through all, her loyal heart clung to its entire belief in him—what he did was well done; however little she might understand him now, she would understand eventually, she felt convinced. Only if he would but be merciful and end her misery soon.

She had entirely forgotten Quarl, and all about him, when she heard his hateful voice saying, "You will have far to go to catch Miss St. John's attention; her thoughts are all—at sea."

It was Sir Philip who had twice spoken to her. He turned now, laughingly, to Quarl. "Why, I never knew you use nautical expressions," he said.



"I always follow the bent of others' minds," was the oracular response.

"I am so sorry I did not hear you," said Hermione, not daring to pay any attention to Mr. Freeman's insolence, as that would have been an acknowledgment of its accuracy. "But I was nearly deafened by being so near the piano. Shall we move a little?"

They threaded their way through the crowd to the conservatory end of the room.

"I was only wondering whether you would like to ride or drive to-morrow," said Sir Philip. "You see, you need not start quite so early if you ride, only I am afraid you will find it so uncomfortable in your habit at the breakfast afterwards."

Hermione's heart bounded. If she rode, then at least she should be safe from the insufferable Quarl, but she knew she could not possibly go to the breakfast in her habit. Must she be present at the breakfast? Surely she would not be missed amongst so many? She looked up gratefully at Sir Philip. "It is so very kind of you," she said, "to have thought of it. I do so dislike that kind of thing, and it would be a capital excuse, if I were riding, not to go to the breakfast, so, perhaps, I might come home directly after the laying of the stone?"

Sir Philip had never seen her look so pleased and softened by anything he had said to her, and was quite enchanted with himself. "I'll tell you what," he



began, "it's all Dorothy's doing; she thought you looked bored and weak, or something; she is always getting ideas about you since you were half drowned, and she has been told some alarming stories about the crowd to-morrow and the heat and so on, and she says, Sir Henry said you were never to be for long in bad air, so she thought if you and I and Duke Myddleton rode, we could see the whole thing very comfortably, and then you and he could go home, if you didn't mind, and I, of course, must go in to the breakfast. I can't help it."

"Yes, but Colonel Myddleton might like to stay—he wants to hear the bishop make his speech, I know he said so. I can come home quite well alone."

"No, he said at first he shouldn't go at all; it was only when Dor proposed our riding that he consented to come, so it's all right; he has to be back early to write some letters, or get some letters, or something."

"Well, it will be nice now, really," said Hermione, feeling that when everything appears most hopeless light generally comes. If they rode home together alone, he could speak; they would ride slowly, and at any rate the rest of the party could not return till long after them. She sat down, moving her dress and making room for Sir Philip by her side. "It is so very kind of you to have arranged it all," she went on; "I do delight in a long morning ride, and I must confess I was dreading the breakfast."

"Yes, when there's no hunting going the best

thing is a jolly go, early in the day," said her host, beginning to think his guest more attractive than he had ever acknowledged, and more sensible, too.

They talked for a little about the hunting round Enderby, and Robert Watt and general topics, and then the bishop came up and joined in the conversation; others came after the bishop, and the conversation became animated. Hermione answered and spoke with quick gladness, for, in spite of the news of the *Mirzapore's* being signalled, she felt safe of an explanation first—that was what her whole heart craved for, to be satisfied. Alas! alas! how can we ever be so in this world! Now and then during the evening her eyes sought that tall figure which hardly moved from the opposite end of the room till just as they were separating for the night. He looked very aged and gaunt to-night, she thought; the temples squarer than ever, his hair more grey; there was a fixed expression of pain and care round his mouth, too. He was always silent, more or less; to-night he spoke to no one but Lady Clinton. There was a good deal of music and many voices, much laughter and clever talking, so that his silence passed over unnoticed.

"I hear you have the celebrated Colonel Myddleton here, Sir Philip," said the bishop, suddenly, during a pause. "I should like to know that man, what does he look like?"

"He is standing by Dorothy at this minute, if you look that way, my lord."

The bishop obeyed. "Ah!" he said, and stood silently watching him for a few seconds. "Do you know him, Miss St. John?" he said, turning to her.

"Yes," she answered, looking up at him with her rare smile.

"You are fortunate, for you seem to know him well by your face," he said, kindly. "He is a man that it is an honour to know. He was, I may say, the salvation of a young brother of my own in India, and of his wife and child, too. Did you never hear, amongst other daring deeds, of a marvellous ride of his?"

"No, he never speaks of India."

"Well, it was wonderful!" He paused, for his voice shook, then he added, "No, I can imagine he would never speak; he is a man that would do but not say. He ought to have for his motto, 'Tace vel face.'"

Hermione's heart leapt and burnt. "If you asked him about it, he would say anybody would have done the same, if not more."

"Yes, but how it has marked him! What a melancholy face! He looks as though death held him by the sleeve."

"He seems very quiet and content always. He is a person with whom it is very *resting* to be, I think."

"I can imagine that what he has been through would dwarf everyday worries and littleness; but still, it is a melancholy face—he seems to be waiting without expectancy or hope."

Hermione's heart tightened. "He often has returns of that fever he had in India; do you think that might affect his look?"

"Perhaps."

A little later, Hermione saw the bishop talking to his hero, and she noticed that Colonel Myddleton had brightened up and looked more like what she remembered him those long years ago. She was glad then. She wondered what that ride had been.

Again later, the bishop came back to her, and sitting down he said, "Do you know, Miss St. John, I think you nearly as wonderful as Colonel Myddleton; you never told me that he saved your life."

The intense colour that flooded Hermione's whole face and neck startled him.

"Forgive me," he said. "I had no idea you would dislike its being alluded to."

"Not at all; no, it is not that, only it was rather awful. I don't often speak of it."

"No, I understand. I hope you are coming in to the ceremony to-morrow?"

So he turned the conversation at once; and then she asked him a good many questions about church building and endowing, for she was anxious to build and endow a small one at Enderby, and he gave her some practical advice.

The evening wore to an end at last; those two had never addressed each other all the time. The bishop privately wondered why; to him, as to so many others,

Colonel Myddleton and Hermione, when seen together, always appeared made for each other. The more he thought it over the more surprised he was at their apparent tacit avoidance of each other. The more he talked to Hermione the more charmed and won he was by her, the more she appeared to him the perfect counterpart of his hero; for Hermione had that rare and beautiful gift of winning people at once, if at all—a power of convincing them on a first acquaintance of how unlike all others she was in combined strength and purity of thought and aim.

“Mina is quite *folle* to-night,” said old Lady Dunstable. “The child must really be taught manners; she does tease that poor Sir Vere beyond endurance.”

But Sir Vere looked very happy under the infliction. And when at last he got up and said he would leave her to become sensible, she went and flirted desperately with the sardonic Quarl, and he returned to his allegiance with promptitude.

Lord Edward had been so assiduous in his attentions to Gladys as to have become wearisome; and Hermione was not the one who most desired release and bed-time.

Gladys felt out of joint mentally. She had heard from Robert, a few lines only, saying he could not come at all at present, and she was dreadfully disappointed. Lord Edward's eternal “Awful bore!” and “Horrid shame!” plagued and wearied her. She

longed for a little kindly chaff from her cousin ; and several times felt on the point of crying.

However, at length, the party broke up. And when Hermione was safely in her own room, she went to the window and threw it wide open. It was a glorious still night. Far, far away, a nightingale was calling with that one piercing note which goes through heart and brain ; and she let her head fall on her clasped hands, sank on her knees, and thought almost with a sob, "To-morrow I shall know !" Yes, to-morrow she would know.

In the room below hers, on into the night, on into the dawn, on into the sunrise, a man wrote and wrote ; with breath drawn hard as a sob, and fingers nerved like steel. And even as he wrote, it grew on him that he had done a cruelly hard and cowardly thing by the only woman he had ever loved. Once or twice when this thought overcame him more forcibly, he stopped, dashed his forehead between his hands and wrung them hard, saying, "My God ! my God !" Then he caught up the pen and wrote more hardly, more incisively than ever. He did not spare himself one reproach, one possible outlet for upbraiding. At times his whole frame quivered like a bar of steel being tempered ; but still he only wrote the faster. And ever and ever the past grew clearer to him, and his remorse grew to an agony. How blind he had been all along, from the very beginning ! He had never been worthy of her. And then, when it was too



late, and he was sundered by a bar of his own throwing down, he had done neither of the two only things he ought to have done—either have told her the whole truth or gone away at once. He could see it now when too late. All his life seemed to come clearly before him, as maybe it will come to us when we die with the relative value of each little action, each trivial word.

That first night when they had met at Charteriss, it would have been agony to go ; but he ought to have done so, or told her the truth—and yet, then, this terrible thing that had come on him now seemed so dim and far away. Ah ! if we only acted with more regard to futurity and not only in this present. What had it been in her eyes this evening in the avenue that had lighted up the whole past to him ? It is strange how sometimes the knowledge of feeling in others comes on us as a revelation startling as the trump of doom. We quite forget that they may have been experiencing it, been swayed by it for months and years ; to us, because we never believed in it, or realized it before, it comes as though it had only just sprung into existence. It shatters us, and shivers all our preconceived ideas of that nature which we perhaps have been thinking so cold and hard to move.

Some such revelation had come to Colonel Myddleton this evening in that one glad look of Hermione's eyes. A whole lifetime seemed suddenly to dawn on



him of lost opportunities and wasted happiness, and now this knowledge stung and goaded him well-nigh to fury. Yet, through all and above all, like one great toll, went the thought that, now he knew what might be, he was the more bound with his own hands to put it from him for ever. No possibility now of so-called friendship. No, he must say farewell for once, for ever and at once, to the one dream of his whole life. He had been weak, he saw it now with appalling distinctness. But he had not meant to cause her this grief; he loved her too nobly to rejoice in, what many a man might have worthily rejoiced in, the love of that grand, single-hearted nature.

“Oh, my love, my love!” he sobbed, at last, laying down his head, worn out, on the last sheet of that terrible agonized farewell. “I did not mean, God knows I did not mean to grieve you so, and you will never know how unutterably precious you have always been to me, always—you whom I have more deeply injured than any one in the whole world.”

It was a frightful struggle of yearning passionate affection, pride, and renouncement. In his remorse he almost wished to make himself out unworthy of any thought, so as to rouse her pride and enlist it against him. In his love he longed that she should at least believe she had not utterly cast away her heart. It was a terrible struggle. The dawn looked coldly in, the candles burned dimly and blue. On his damp forehead the tangled hair lay matted and

tossed. The strong, proud, self-contained man fought with his heart, and conquered. With a cold, quivering hand he signed his name after the last farewell. And then, with convulsed and trembling lips, he blessed her softly aloud, as though, indeed, his words might reach her in her sleep, and calm and soothe her.

The sun was shining brilliantly into his room, as he turned round after sealing the packet. He opened the window wide; the birds were singing in the wonderful clearness of the awakening day, the flowers shone in the garden below, and for him was reserved for all his life utter blank and settled gloom. Men had called him a lucky fellow, men had praised his marvellous courage, endurance, and distinction. And there he stood on that summer morning, stripped of all happiness, a beggar for love's sake; and to think that where he had truly cared he had wrecked and blasted on his way. Low, indeed, none lower, he stood in his own esteem, weak and worthless and found wanting. Now he should never see her in her own home, his darling, beautiful, queen-like love; never. He dared not even think of it for her sake. No, from henceforth their lives must lie in totally different lines and meet no more till death built a bridge. He felt that hers was a nature that could never forget; for himself he felt it was the same.

Not so far apart, Hermione turned on her pillow, throwing out one white arm like an ivory sceptre, and

a smile of ineffable peace came and went on the half-open mouth. She was dreaming that she stood on the steps at Enderby and that he was riding up the long drive to meet her. His face wore the same strange intense look she had noticed that evening. She dreamt he was dead, but she did not seem to mind; for was he not coming to fetch her on her own beautiful Arab, Falcon? The quick closing of a window below broke the thread of her dream, his figure turned into that of Quarl, and she heard again the mocking ring of the words, "The *Mirzapore* is signalled;" the smile died out, she sighed and fell again into dreamless sleep. Whilst below her he threw himself wearily down to a short, uncertain, fitful sleep of exhaustion.

Sleep, sleep, and dream no more, oh, quiet sleepers! Awakening will be weary.

## CHAPTER XXII.

For the first time for very long, Josline was standing on the lawn, feeding her pigeons. Now she was in the open light of day, you noticed how much she was altered. Her uncle leant against the window-frame of the den, watching her. Miss Barbara was chaffering with Nan Partridge, over a setting of eggs ; and Mrs. Turgoose was upstairs, helping Phœbe with the clean linen.

Presently there came a ring at the gate, and Mrs. Turgoose, looking out of Josline's window, drew back, in great agitation, saying, "Phœbe, here are the gentlefolks from the Manor, and me in my print gown all tucked up. Look sharp, child, and unpin me, do !"

Phœbe, quite as much flustered as her superior, pulled helplessly at her own skirt, in the vain endeavour to drag it back through the pocket-holes.

"La, child ! what does it matter about your skirt ? Unpin me, *do !*"

"Turgoose !" said Miss Barbara's voice, lowered

to a discreet and sepulchral whisper, on the staircase. "Miss St. John and Miss Clinton are waiting to be let in."

"Coming, madam!" from Mrs. Turgoose, tearing at the pins. "Phœbe, if you don't help me, quick, I'll pin a dishelout on to you, I will."

"Turgoose, are you coming?" (from her mistress).

"Phœbe!" (from the housekeeper, in agonized accents).

Phœbe, alternately wrung her hands, tore at the pins, and ran round and round her superior.

"Phœbe, if you go on any more like a demented fowl, or leastways, like a hen without a head, I'll——"

"Turgoose!"

One piteous wrench and the unhappy gown gave way, leaving Mrs. Turgoose defenceless, Phœbe in tears, and Miss Barbara stalking upstairs.

"You are long, indeed, answering the bell," began the mistress. Then, even her cast-iron face lost the dagger-like frown, and she smiled broadly on seeing poor Turgoose's discomfiture. "Well, you are in rags!" she said, as the housekeeper held up her skirt lapping round her feet. "You had better go and mend it, and I will go to the door."

"Madam! Miss Barbara! If Mr. Giles were to know? I must; I can't let you."

Poor Turgoose fell a-weeping; but Miss Barbara majestically drew herself up.

"Turgoose!" she said, sternly. "You are foolish! it is not the action that demeans. A Fairfax can do anything becomingly."

"Oh, madam! Answer the bell? No!" with frantic struggles to the door.

Miss Barbara spoke sharply. "You! to go to the door all rags? I would far rather open it myself; at least, I am neat."

She turned and stalked downstairs. Neat? Yes, with black mittens and little black apron and cap on end.

If any one but Hermione had been the cause, though but the innocent cause, of all this turmoil, they would have been received with but scant courtesy. But Miss St. John might do anything, and who could have resisted her to-day? She stood, in the bright morning air, literally glittering with happiness and the idea of coming joy. Her beautiful face, usually a little sad in its repose and calm, was, to-day, quivering with expression. A new life, a new power of living, seemed to have come down on her, like a benediction; and, for the first time in her life, perhaps, the whole loveliness of her figure, features, and colouring came out in striking, even startling predominance. That brave, bright nature was expanding, under the influence of happiness, fully and gladly, as the weight of these last constraining years was beginning to lift.

Miss Barbara felt all her harshness melt away at



the sight of that face, even as we soften our voices in talking to a child. She held out a welcoming hand and made no remark on the earliness of the hour, the thought that had been uppermost in her mind on descending to the gate.

“I am afraid I have come inconveniently early,” said Hermione, after the first greetings. “But I find I must go, with Sir Philip and Lady Clinton, to this ceremony at N——. I find, too, I must leave Characteriss in, at the latest, two days, and so I have come to ask you the greatest favour.” She paused a little, then said, “Might Gladys go and see Josline, and we might follow afterwards?”

“Yes, certainly,” said Miss Barbara, a little nervously for her; and in a few moments they were alone.

“Miss Fairfax, I want you to be very kind to me,” began Hermione. “I haven’t known you very long, but—but will you spare me Josline for a little?” she ended, abruptly.

Now Hermione had prepared many speeches calculated to win Miss Fairfax, but they all failed her in the actual emergency. Yet it is doubtful if the most subtly devised and worded request could more artfully have found its way to the *arcana* of Miss Barbara’s heart. Miss St. John had placed herself in the position of a suppliant; she was imploring Miss Fairfax to grant her, as the greatest favour, that which the stern, maiden lady was only too anxious to yield.



It became Miss Barbara well to hesitate a little, demur as to ways and means. Of course, this but served to render Miss St. John more anxious and to enhance Miss Fairfax's dignity. And who does not love to feel their dignity delicately addressed ? It ended well for all. It ended, indeed, in Hermione taking one of those curiously cross-barred and netted hands and pressing it with a warmth and feeling that made Miss Fairfax's lips tremble, so unaccustomed was she to observe any act or word of hers calling forth any spontaneous mark of affection in others. She was so moved that she withdrew her hand, quickly and coldly, longing all the time not only to return the pressure, but actually to kiss the beautiful face looking into hers, and she said, in an odd, harsh voice—

“Then you won't spoil her? and you will take care of her and make her obey you?”

Hermione, a little flushed at her temerity, promised faithful obedience to all and every wish of the aunt, and they went into the garden to break the news to Josline.

They found Gladys sitting on the seat between Mr. Fairfax and his niece.

Hermione laid an imploring hand on the aunt's arm; too late. Miss Barbara went straight up to Josline, and said—

“Josline, you are going the day after to-morrow to Enderby, with Miss St. John. We think a little change will do you good.”

Josline did not rise, as her uncle and Gladys had done ; she turned excessively pale, and a slight spasm flew over her face. Mr. Fairfax turned towards her, Gladys clapped her hands joyfully.

“Well, child ! can’t you speak ?” said Miss Barbara, not unkindly, though shortly. “It’s excessively kind of Miss St. John, I am sure.”

Hermione was watching that speaking face, with a vague alarm. She held out her two hands to Josline, and said, gently—

“Won’t you come, Josline ? I will try and make you happy.”

Unhappy Josline ! Poor, weak, loving heart ! She knew her only chance was not to go, not to yield to the joy that drove her nearly delirious in anticipation, even. Oh ! after all these months to see him again, be near him, hear his voice, see the love that lay brimming in those frank, dear eyes, feel his strong hand clasp hers ! She gasped, speechless. And yet, and yet, what could come of it, save misery supreme to her, and to him ? Oh ! did she, perhaps, think he loved her more than he really did ? Could he bear to see her day by day ; perhaps wean himself from her more easily, in seeing how weak and good-for-nothing she was ? Might she not believe this, and go and be happy for a little, short time, though it killed her in the end ? Cunning sophistry of love ! She could not refuse, and, if she did, of what avail ? She knew her aunt had not thought of what she would like ; it had

been decided without even asking her, and they would not allow her to remain, even if she refused ever so urgently. Oh, no! the fates had decreed she must go and meet him, and face and fight out her life; so she would go.

Hermione could not divine what the struggle was in Josline's mind; but her loving, all-embracing nature saw there was some tossing and working to and fro; the rapid alternations of colour, the short, uneven breathing, the quivering lips, all showed it. She thought that the young girl was shy, so she knelt down by her and put one arm gently round her, and said—

“Josline, will you come? I think you will be happy!” She said it very low; and Josline's head fell on her shoulder, and she said only, “Help me!”

The appeal, so simple, so touching, that no one had heard but herself, smote Hermione's heart wide open. “I will!” she answered, as low, and registered those two words like a vow. How little she knew how Josline meant them, or what they implied in the hereafter! In this present, they meant help not to go, in the hereafter they meant help to undo. She did not understand them now, and answered blindly, as we all are apt to do when stirred and carried out of actual understanding. When she understood them later, she did help; and yet, now even, Josline felt borne up and strengthened within the clasp of that slender, nervous arm; and all the wealth of love

surging and whelming in Hermione's heart seemed to overflow a little and water that trembling spirit.

Mr. Fairfax was taken by surprise, and it seemed to him a terrible thing thus suddenly to lose his darling. But Miss Barbara carried him off before he could say much, and Josline had appeared to him to give herself up willingly to go. Perhaps, after all, the complete change might do her good, and Crosbie and the doctor had both agreed that change ought to be tried. At any rate, Enderby was in the same county, and a line from Josline at any time would bring him over quickly to fetch her back. And yet, how they would miss her! It was terrible to think how lonely the house would be. Frightful! he dared not think of it; he would not say any more, after giving a reluctant consent, but went back to his den, drew the lily's heart in front of him, and, taking up his beloved, poured forth such exquisite strains as only his spirit, wrung as it was with fear and longing, could have evoked. He would not go out again till the guests had gone, and he had his *Anima* all to himself once more. The great tears hung in his eyes and blinded him. Oh! what would it be when she was gone! his darling, with her sweet, spiritual face, and her gentle, loving, clinging ways; her footfall, that he heard, though it was so light he himself always said it would not fracture a gossamer; her voice, so melodiously clear and low that it thrilled him from head to foot in calling his name! And yet, what would

he not endure and deny himself, to give her back her former quiet gladness, her early spring and brightness? Alas! in his heart he acknowledged that the blight that had fallen on his herb o' grace would never more be removed; but, as yet, his mind refused credence to so utterly sorrowful a truth.

Our hearts are so wise, our minds so strong.

Miss Barbara went back to the lawn, triumphant. Josline was exhausted with excitement—her eyes shone like stars, her voice was faint and weak; she leant back on the twisted seat, and gasped slowly for breath. Hermione had only waited for Miss Fairfax's return to go away and leave them to rest, and devise the many expedients necessary to save time. It was settled that she should call for Josline, and take her on in her carriage, when she left Charteriss; and then, saying that if Miss Barbara thought of anything further she hoped she would let her know, she carried off Gladys, and left Josline to rest. As they turned the corner of the house, Hermione looked back. Josline was leaning forward, watching them; her eyes seemed all her face; they were full of an indescribable mixture of anguish, longing, and despair. Only once again did Hermione ever see them look like that; and then—she knew why.

Just as they reached the gate, Mr. Fairfax came out on them.

"You are going to take my ewe lamb!" he said, with an attempt at smiling.

“Yes ; for a little. I do earnestly hope to bring her back stronger !” said Hermione.

“Ah ! I shall come to fetch her, I think !” he answered, fumbling at the gate. “Good-bye !”

## CHAPTER XXIII.

HERMIONE and Gladys hurried back to Charteriss, only just in time to dress for the general start. The riders, indeed, would leave a little later than the carriages ; but Hermione had a letter or two to write to Robert and Mrs. Match. She sat down hurriedly, whilst her maid was laying out her habit in the adjoining room, and wrote first a few hasty lines to Robert, asking him to send the carriage to meet them half way ; and then a longer letter to Mrs. Match, giving all kinds of directions as to what was to be sent in it by way of wraps and rugs and cushions, and begging her to have the "pearl" room, next her own, prepared for Miss Fairfax. It was the room she had always had as a child, when staying at Enderby, and was only separated from her own bedroom by a sitting-room, which she meant Josline to use, if she liked.

Just as she was finishing her last letter, she called to her maid, asking what o'clock it was, and whether it was very late.



“Only half an hour, ma’am!” was the answer. So Hermione sealed the letters with a little, sharp, happy pressure on the signet ring that had belonged to Mark; and then, taking them both in her hand, went into the next room to change her dress.

Gladys and she had run straight into the house and upstairs, without seeing any one on their return, and she had only sent word by her maid to Lady Clinton that she would be sure and not keep Sir Philip waiting. Now she began hurriedly to undo her dress, when her eyes fell suddenly on a large packet lying on a table by the fireplace. She stopped, and said—

“What is that?”

“Oh! I beg your pardon, ma’am!” said the maid, fetching it and giving it to her. “Mr. Smith, the butler, begged me to give it into your own hands.”

Hermione took it very quietly, whilst a dreadful feeling of unknown strength seemed suddenly to paralyze her tongue. She guessed of course instantly that this was what he had said he would “write;” but why write when he could have spoken to her to-day, so easily and at such length? She had only to open the packet and see; but she dared not. As long as those seals were unbroken, anything might be true, any possible future, any gathering up of the past; but if once they were opened, who knew what might be the ending? And why had he written when they were going to meet so soon? It frightened her, and

gave her a helpless feeling of wishing to postpone her last chance. Now that certitude was within her grasp, she longed to be again back in the old dream-land of possibilities. Should she meet him, having read the packet, or not? It appeared to her impossible to decide. She could not open it before her maid; and yet she must decide, for there she stood holding the habit. Time was getting on. What should she do? For almost the first time in her life she stood irresolute, facing the inevitable, stood staring at the packet till the maid ventured to say—

“Time is getting on, ma’am, and I did hear as how Sir Philip were wishing to start earlier, on account of Colonel Myddleton’s not going.”

“Not going! How do you mean?” said Hermione, looking up with a pale frown, and passing her hand softly over her face.

“Being gone, I should say; not but that it is both ways correct, ma’am!” added the didactic Abigail. “Not going a-riding by reason of his being left here this morning.”

Miss St. John stared silently at her maid, who, a little startled by her eyes, said, “Ah! yes, ma’am, to be sure, you and Miss Clinton had gone out when the colonel got a telegram. I saw it, too,” she said, with a comfortable nod. “The *Mercy-poor* had landed her passengers, or was going to. It seems the message came last night, and somehow got mislaid, and the colonel was very angry. He had one yesterday, too.

I'm sure, I don't quite see. Howsoever, he packed and went away, which his valet said was a pity, for that he had his fever on him again——”

Hermione cut her loquacious damsel short. “Then, Colonel Myddleton left this morning, after I went out with Miss Clinton?”

“Yes ma'am; suddenly and unbeknownst.”

“Oh!” answered her mistress. “Well, I must dress now; give me my things, quickly.”

Marton wondered at the deadly cold of Miss St. John's hands, as they touched hers on fastening the habit; but that stern, set look on the rigid face, forbade any further speech.

Hermione was not a mistress who was ever talked to, unless she spoke first, a circumstance that perhaps excused her maid's loquacity when she had a chance. When she was dressed, all but her hat, she said, quietly, “You can go now, Marton.”

She was alone, but she well knew it could only be for a minute or two, for she heard already the tramp of the horses being led round. She stood quite still as her maid had left her, and though she had not opened the packet she *knew* it was—farewell. He would not have gone without seeing her if it had been otherwise; indeed, he must have passed Old Court on his way. When? probably when she was kneeling by Josline. Marton spoke of two telegrams; then he had known last night. And she had slept, unheeding, resting on the joy of this morning, which was never to

come. She could not open the letter now, there was no time ; she drew a key from her chain, unlocked her despatch case, put the packet in, locked it and returned the key to the chain that always hung round her neck. Then she wrung her hands hard together, passed one over her face, and went quietly downstairs.

Sir Philip was already pacing the hall. "Every one is gone !" he said, cheerily, "and we are rather late. Never mind, we'll have a good swing after them."

She said something, she never knew what. He came by her side and was just putting her into her saddle, when Quarl appeared under the portico.

"What ! not gone ?" said his host, springing up.

"No, those sort of things bore me. I know the bishop will be long-winded, and the champagne bad," he said, in his curious, harsh voice.

Hermione was gathering her reins together blindly ; her eyes had a kind of dull, glassy look in them.

Mr. Freeman came up and patted her horse's neck, then stooping till his head was bent close to her knee, as though doing something to the bridle, he said, very low, "Colonel Myddleton left suddenly this morning ; he was very sorry not to say good-bye to you."

"Thank you," she answered, in a voice like an echo from far away ; "I knew it."

"Ready, Miss St. John ?" from Sir Philip—and they were off.

Quarl had stayed on purpose to inform her of this

piece of news. Was he satisfied? He hardly knew; he stood staring grimly after the retreating riders, shaking his head monotonously. He was baffled again. "One thing is the less they show, the more they feel," he muttered. "Well, I've done my best by her, and—I hope she's grateful!" He certainly had, according to his light. He thought nothing but pain could come of an explanation before she knew through others what he in a great measure guessed to be the case; and so he had worked to prevent it, and believed he had.

But circumstances are generally too strong for us, and there is a certain mole called chance, that often works by unknown ways of which we have no cognizance; he is passing us swiftly underfoot, whilst above we seem to see a plain, undevious way, flecked by no obstruction.

Outside the park they stretched out into a quick canter, and for some time the pace was too rapid for more than a short word or two. The air, the fleet movement, the invigorating exercise of bodily, muscular action, affected Hermione beneficially. The deadly pallor of her cheeks lost its greyiness of hue, and she began to breath less rapidly and more evenly.

At length, Sir Philip drew rein on passing over the ridge, and said, as they settled down to a quiet trot, "Wasn't it a horrid bore, Myddleton being called away like that? We might have had such a jolly morning of it, and I am not sure he was even fit to

come as far as this. He looked as though he hadn't slept a wink, and that horrid sort of ague was on him again."

"It does seem a pity," said Hermione, longing to ask for further reason for the departure, but feeling guiltily unable to do so.

"And it's all such nonsense!" went on Sir Philip. "One of his Quixotic notions of chivalry. It appears, the wife, or rather the widow of the general, on whose staff he was in India, is arriving by the *Mirzapore*, and he thought he ought to go and look after her landing. Really, in these days, women can do everything for themselves, but Duke always thought a woman couldn't even lift her glove."

"Had he known them long in India?" said Miss St. John, feeling she must say something.

"Well, I don't know; he said she was a delicate little thing, and quite unable to fend for herself. She was sure to have picked up some one on board, I told him; those Indian widows always do. He didn't like the idea, though, I can tell you; he stammered and coloured, and finally said, in his odd, haughty way, that it was an old promise, and he must fulfil it. One knows very well what his 'must' is—fire and water wouldn't stop him."

"No, of course not," said Hermione, with a leap of trust in his honour.

"She's been a widow only about eight months, I fancy; but he wasn't very communicative. By-the-



by, I was to say good-bye to you, for him, and he was afraid he couldn't come to Enderby, but of course he would write. It is all very sudden and unexpected—somehow, I couldn't make out whether he was glad or sorry. That cantankerous Quarl began saying something about the general, and the way he had behaved to Duke out in India. By Jove! didn't he catch it! you know Duke's way? He was splendid. He turned on Freeman, there and then, and he said, 'Let the dead rest, sir!''"

"Yes?" said Hermione, trembling all over. "Well?"

"Oh, it wasn't much to say, I grant you; but you should have seen him. He looked as hard as nails, and as proud—as proud——" Sir Philip stumbled in his speech, trying to find a simile. "Well, *as* proud," he ended, lamely, but with a brevity that was striking. "Well, then Dorothy wanted to know about her, what she was like, and all that, and where she was going? and he didn't seem to know much. But he said he thought she was going to her old home, and that she was very young, about twenty-four, he thought. I fancy she is rather friendless in the way of relations. Dor wanted to know what she was like. 'Fair,' he said, and 'slight'; that was all. You see it was all in a hurry."

"Will he take her home, then, and come back here, or what?" said Hermione.

"Upon my word, I don't know; he didn't know



himself; he said he would write soon. Dor rather wanted him to come back straight, but I don't believe he knew what he would do. He's only got himself to please, you see."

"Yes, I see," said Hermione. It was true, no one had a claim on him, no one, least of all, herself.

They went on again, quickly. Presently Sir Philip said, "There's something odd about it all—his manner was so odd, I mean. I like him awfully, but I don't quite make him out."

"He is difficult to understand," said Hermione, briefly, all her heart rising in a passionate feeling that she could have understood him if—he had only wished it.

"Well, after he was gone, Quarl said one or two odd things. It appears that general was an awful brute, he drank and gambled hideously; he married this girl at sixteen, and ill-treated her shamefully. He was frightfully jealous, and was under some deep obligation to Myddleton, in fact, once he saved their lives during the Mutiny; the little wife, who seems to have been a brave little soul, was just going to blow her brains out, or something awful, when Myddleton came in. I dare say he thinks nothing of it, it came as part of the whole thing; I never heard him mention it. I suppose the long and the short of it is that she fell in love with him, poor thing! and I am sure I don't wonder. The general insulted him horribly; there was a great row, and Myddleton came out of it

splendidly, of course. It was all hushed up, and then the old brute drank himself to death, and here's the widow. What do you say to it all?"

Hermione felt very faint, but she came of a brave race, and, holding her hand tightly to her heart, she said, "I suppose there will be but one end. He must be so sorry for her."

"Well, that's curious; that is what Dorothy said. Now, you know, I don't quite think that; it's all very well to flirt with a woman, and all that, not that I say he did," he added, hastily, moved by an involuntary action of revolt on Hermione's part. "I can't think he did, somehow, for that isn't his line at all; but we'll say he did, for argument's sake. Well, a man may do that, and go a long way, too; but when it comes to marrying—well, they've generally had enough of it, don't you see. They know too well what they are about, they know too well the sort of thing it would be, and all that; the bloom's off," he ended, with a curious look far ahead, and tapping his boot with his whip. "No, I think Myddleton's not the man to marry from pity, though he might, perhaps, what is so-called, flirt from pity, unless—he had somehow got himself entangled, and thought himself bound in honour so to do."

Dead silence. Hermione felt blind, her heart seemed to stop beating, a horrible glaring light seemed to flood the past; down on her like strokes from the hammer of doom came those words: "I am

bound in honour to another." If this were really so, then the end had come, and all was over between them. She could not see, she was sick, stunned, and giddy, she felt as though she were reeling in her saddle. In reality she rode steadily on, and moved neither nerve nor muscle, excepting that on each temple her pulses beat wildly.

"Now, you see, I think you and Dorothy wrong," he went on. "However, I shall wait and see, it's no good conjecturing. It would be odd, though, if he did marry her, she is the last sort of woman, by description, to captivate Myddleton. But it's just the sort of thing a man like that goes and does—he ruins his whole life for an idea."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEN they arrived at N—— they found the town crammed with country people, and had some difficulty in getting through the crowds. Several of Sir Philip's friends rode up, one or two were introduced to Hermione, and, amidst a general din and chatter, they threaded their way to the large open space where the foundation-stone was just about to be laid. They were late, in spite of their hasty ride, and could not reach the enclosure reserved for members of the committee. They reined up in a small compact body in a good position, and then they could not hear anything that was said, probably no loss! as Sir Philip loudly observed to Hermione, with his usual want of public caution. They saw very well indeed. The actual ceremony was not of long duration, and as soon as it was over the crowd began to give way and roll in slow tides towards the Town Hall, in the vague hope of seeing all the grandees arrive, and catching a kind of drowsy echo of the speeches. The sudden

pressure, the noise, the heat seemed to excite Hermione's horse beyond control—it reared and plunged frightfully, and required all her good riding to keep within any bounds. A sudden rush nearly unseated her, and terrified Sir Philip so much that he did the most foolish thing he could do, laid a quick hand on her bridle.

“Let go !” she said, very low, keeping her hands well down, and looking him straight in the eyes.

“For God's sake !” he urged, as the crowd swayed and surged round them, unable to get away on account of the temporary barriers.

“Let go !” she said again, as low. “It is my only chance, leave him to me.”

Sir Philip obeyed, and the tussle that ensued between brute force and controlled will was terrible. She conquered, though—the horse gave in, covered with foam and trembling from head to foot. When at last Hermione could pay attention to something beyond her immediate self, she looked up at Sir Philip, “as cool as glass,” as he afterwards declared, “though white as a sheet, from sheer exhaustion, I believe, and not fright, though my blood ran cold once or twice. I thought it was all up.” And she said she thought she had better ride home at once and take Blackbird out of the crush, as she doubted her capacity to calm him again sufficiently to enjoy herself, and she was rather tired and hot with the struggle ; so if he would explain to Dorothy why she did not appear, she would just ride quietly home.

Sir Philip was in a state of perplexity ; he could not bear letting her go alone, and yet it was absolutely necessary for him to be at the breakfast. She assured him she felt perfectly happy—the rush was over, Blackbird was calming down, only there was really very little more to see ; it was very hot, and her early walk had tired her rather ; it was foolish to have gone to Old Court with this ride before her. So, with a little wave of her whip-hand and a faint smile, she turned about and rode quietly out of the rapidly thinning press.

Sir Philip watched her wistfully for a few seconds, but Blackbird appeared to be going quietly enough, and the slight, graceful figure went erectly on its way ; besides, he had just seen how splendidly she could handle a horse, it was only her strength he doubted. However, there was nothing for it but to let her go. He spurred after the old groom, gave him an order or two, and then went quickly off in the opposite direction. He never was more relieved in his life than when he got home, late in the afternoon, and found Hermione had reached the house safely long hours before, and, after a short rest, had gone out into the grounds.

Lady Clinton was much disappointed. She had only seen Hermione for a short time at breakfast, and wanted to tell her all about the speeches, and also to see that she was not altogether “knocked to bits,” according to Sir Philip. Her husband could not cease



talking of the struggle, and was overcome with admiration of her horsemanship. All this Hermione had foreseen; she had therefore taken a hasty luncheon and then strolled far away out in the grounds. With rare self-control she had not opened the packet, leaving it locked in her desk. She determined she would not open it till night, when at least she was sure of some hours of uninterrupted quiet, but she felt that she could not stay in the house with it so near her, and so she had gone far away. Self-control, that strange power, composed of such curious and intricate threads! wound how strongly and unevenly round what delicate and fragile organizations! Here was Hermione able to wait hours for the best time to solve her whole future, yet unequal to staying within a few paces of its solution.

When she was dressing for dinner, an impatient tap at the door preceded the hasty entrance of Lady Clinton. "Well," she said, "you have done for yourself, you look tired to death. What black eyes! How could you go off all alone for the afternoon? Unsociable creature!"

"Dear Dorothy, don't be angry. I am unsociable, I think, but I was so tired of everybody!" said Hermione motioning to the maid to leave them, and laying a hand of entreaty on her friend's arm. "And, you know, I wanted so much to go round everywhere again," she continued, a little vaguely. "See, I have had a letter from Robert, and I must go back the day after to-morrow."



“You shall not,” said Lady Clinton, looking at her curiously and penetratingly. “Why, to-morrow is the ball, and then the bazaar; I can’t spare you, and you shan’t go; there!” and therewith her ladyship sat down on the sofa and stamped her foot determinately.

Hermione stood holding out Robert’s letter. “Now, Dorothy, do be reasonable.”

“You aren’t, and I won’t,” said Lady Clinton, oblivious of grammar and politeness.

“But, Dorothy, do listen. You know in the beginning I told you I must go sooner than you would like, in order to get things ready. See! Robert says I am wanted. I am really very sorry, but——”

“No, you aren’t sorry a bit; it’s all horrid together,” broke in her hostess. “Here is the bishop quite wild about you, everybody wanting to know you, Phil raving about you, and—and——” She stopped, with a quivering lip, then getting up in a sudden burst of anger, she said, “The fact is, it’s all the doing of that horrid Colonel Myddleton; he has spoilt the whole party, and I hate him; there!” Hermione stood quite still, her face hardened like a marble mask. “I don’t care what you say, Ione, I believe you care more for his being here than for any one of us, or, indeed, for us all put together; there!” Lady Clinton stopped walking up and down, and whereas she had till now carefully avoided her friend’s eye, she now stole a glance at her, startled by her total

silence. Hermione was not looking at her, she was looking quietly at the letter in her hand. "Why don't you speak?" said Lady Clinton, pettishly, snatching her hands in and out of each other.

"It is no good—you are angry with me—I don't understand," said Hermione at last, apparently a little stunned.

Something in this simple, and, to Dorothy, totally unlooked-for answer, smote her with an overwhelming sense of her injustice and cruelty. "Oh, Hermione!" she said, running up to her, and putting her arms round her, "don't look like that, darling! Have I hurt you? I didn't mean to; I am tired and cross, forgive me; you are always so good and unselfish. I know it's horrid of me to have spoken to you like that, and you look so pale. Darling, do say you forgive me," and she kissed the quiet white face again and again.

Hermione did not return the caress, but she said gently, "Then you are not angry, Dorothy? I did not mean to vex you, only, you see, I must go because they want me."

"Yes, dear, I see; I mean I don't see; but I will believe you, Ione, if you will only not look like that."

"Like what?"

"Oh! I don't know, odd. *Do* say you forgive me!"

"Yes, certainly; but don't you see, Dorothy, I must go, really; it hasn't anything to do with anybody else," she ended in a hesitating voice, twisting

the letter round and round, and not looking at Lady Clinton.

"No, no, I know it hasn't, of course it hasn't. I can't think how I could have been so stupid as to say so," asseverated her hostess, hastily, uneasy at the curious quietude of Hermione, which filled her with a restless nervousness as though she were talking to some one in their sleep. "I knew you were going, Gladys told me, and you are going to take Josline Fairfax with you. I was vexed at you going so soon. Ione, *do smile*," she ended, her eyes filling with tears.

"Then you are not vexed now?" said Miss St. John, looking up with her clear, beautiful eyes, gravely and sorrowfully, like a hurt creature dumbly appealing.

"No, no, I was only sorry to lose you, and it seemed so sudden, but then we are coming to you, I know."

"Yes, you are all coming, you know," said Hermione, dreamily.

"Ione, *do smile*," and Lady Clinton gave her a little shake, very gently.

"I think I am very tired, do you know, Dorothy, but I will come to dinner if you will let me dress," was the answer as the ten minutes' bell rang, and Marton knocked at the door.

"Good gracious! How late I shall be! Phil will be frantic. Kiss me, Hermione," and with

a hasty embrace, Lady Clinton rushed from the room.

“Phil, look after Ione at dinner, she sits near you ; she is awfully done up by that ride,” she called to her husband through his dressing-room door.

## CHAPTER XXV.

LADY CLINTON watched Hermione carefully during dinner, but she saw her talking away to the bishop, and apparently much as usual, though perhaps paler.

After dinner Lady Dunstable came and sat by her. She first of all expatiated on the bishop's speech, which appeared to have made a great impression on everybody—a fact to which Hermione gave easy credence, as he seemed to her very large-minded and tolerant; and then she asked whether it was true that Josline Fairfax was going back to Enderby with her. To this Miss St. John answered in the affirmative. Lady Dunstable sat thoughtfully for a little while in silence; then she said that she had not yet had an opportunity of asking her what she thought about Josline, but she was very anxious to know.

Hermione hesitated, and then answered slowly, she hardly knew what she dared to think. Josline appeared to her fragile and delicate in the extreme, but she could only hope that change of scene would do her good.

"And being loved—I mean not thwarted at every turn," said the old lady.

"Her uncle and aunt love her deeply," said Hermione.

"Yes, I know, but that terrible Miss Barbara must be a horror!"

"She doesn't mean it," answered Miss St. John. "And I think Josline understands her."

"Ah! well, but I should have thought so sensitive a child as Josline looks would have needed more sympathetic companionship."

Hermione was silent; presently she said, questioningly and half thinking aloud, "I wonder if I spent the spring abroad, whether they would allow her to come with me."

"Ah! that might do her good, indeed," said the old lady. "I, too, am going to the Riviera next spring; we might make a little party, only——" She paused, then said meaningly, "I should not have thought you would go alone."

"I shall not be alone if Josline comes," said Hermione, looking up.

"No," said Lady Dunstable, simply. Something in that clear, quiet gaze stopped whatever further she might be going to add.

"Too much love is dangerous also," said Lady Dunstable, beginning again. "It intoxicates a weak subject."

"Too much love?" said Hermione, wistfully.

"I was thinking of Josline at Enderby. There will be you to love her, and Mrs. Match."

"Yes, but we shall not harm her, I think."

"There is also Robert Watt," ended Lady Dunstable, with sudden and appalling candour.

Hermione was silent again.

"You do not fear that, my dear?"

"I think everything must come to a crisis sooner or later, and perhaps the sooner the better—it is suspense that kills, not certainty.

"Then you would not be against it?"

"God forbid, if they wished it," said Hermione, with startling energy. "I would do my utmost to help them; but," she said, very quietly, "I do not think Josline will ever marry."

"Ah? Well, I agree with you."

"It's entirely supposition for and against on my part; I have never heard a word," said Hermione. "Perhaps we had better not discuss it."

"You are full of gentleness and wisdom, mon enfant," said Lady Dunstable, and then they were both silent.

Sir Philip came and sat by Hermione, and entertained her with a long account of the breakfast and the speeches; at least he believed he did—she listened with great apparent interest and put many questions; yet, afterwards, she could not have described what had been discussed, even to the topic. This strange dream-like power of vivid instantaneous comprehension of



the subject, and subsequent total oblivion of it, continued through that long evening. She heard everything that each separate person talked about, as single instruments in an orchestra are seen, though only heard in unison ; a strange faculty for disentangling thoughts and words seemed evoked in her by the unnatural efforts she was making to prevent thinking on one subject. She heard Sir Vere talking nonsense to Mina, Gladys trying to entertain some very simpering young ladies, Lord Edward squabbling with Quarl, and the bishop talking to Lady Clinton about Colonel Myddleton. She heard the name over and over again—they were talking about his career, his character, his return to England, his sudden departure. And Hermione looked in Sir Philip's face and laughed about Blackbird's behaviour, whilst her whole heart was wrung through and through with anguish.

Sir Philip thought he had never seen her look so handsome, and what a thousand pities a girl with those eyes should not marry ! Wouldn't she make a fool of a man in no time ? The bishop was coming up to her—he had included her in the end of the conversation ; could she bear it ? She became still and silent, mentally, like a deer half bent ready for flight. At first her heart beat so loudly it deafened her, and she did not hear what he was saying to her. He only wanted to be condoled with on the loss of his hero. She could say quite honestly and readily that

she was sorry he had gone and left them, etc. ; cold words, meaning nothing more than ordinary politeness. But she saw Quarl making his way towards her, and she felt that she could not bear his keen sarcasms and innuendoes, so she got up and took the bishop to look at the device for lighting the statue of Night. Quarl as yet had left her in peace this evening, and seeing him approaching her now, made her quiver as though hot iron had been applied to her heart. The bishop had heard some part of the ghost story, and was anxious to hear the whole of it, and see the oriel chamber ; so Hermione called up Gladys, and sat down in silence to listen also. She had never heard it so fully related as now by Gladys, and it made nearly as much impression on her as it had done on Colonel Myddleton. She was, indeed, curiously enough, very much in the same state of mind he had been in when it was told to him.

“I am sure he would have come back ; they killed him and then told her that story,” she said, looking up, as Gladys ended.

“Why, Ione ! that is what Colonel Myddleton said,” exclaimed Gladys. “It upset him dreadfully. I told him the first night he came here last time, and he made me take him and show him the oriel chamber.”

“Suppose we go and see it now,” said the bishop. Hermione was beyond words.

“At any rate, he has acted up to the first part—gone away,” said Quarl, close to them.

The bishop turned round short and looked at the speaker. " Ah ! Mr. Freeman," he said, thoughtfully. " Even if they killed Myddleton, I believe he would come back. I never knew any man on whose honour I would so entirely rely."

" In—deed ! " said Quarl.

They all went to the oriel chamber, and up the great staircase. Hermione felt faint and dizzy with the recollection of the night of the tableaux, and stood alone at the foot of the steps, looking up at the rest.

" Would you, too, rely on Colonel Myddleton's honour, Miss St. John ? " said Quarl.

She looked round at him quietly with measureless scorn in her clear, bright eyes, and she said, " To the death ! "

## CHAPTER XXVI.

So this was the end of all.

Hermione stood in her long dark-blue dressing-gown, before the writing-table in her room. It was long past midnight ; indeed, it was nearly morning and sunrise, but what to her could the day ever bring again of gladness or brightness ? She believed nothing.

She was only partially undressed—her hair was still done up, but she had thrown on her dressing-gown, and sent her maid away almost immediately on reaching her room that night ; then she had unlocked the desk, taken out the packet, and proceeded to read the contents. They had taken her long, for she had read slowly, weighing each turn and phrase as she read. Towards the middle of the thick letter, she had got up from her chair, and sunk quietly on her knees ; it seemed to her only possible to bear its revealing in that position. She had pushed the letter further on the table, leant her two elbows on either side of the sheets that quivered under her breathing, and let her

head rest on both hands. So still was she, so tranced, that it was hardly possible to perceive even the rise and fall of her chest in taking breath. When she ended, she remained gazing fixedly for nearly half an hour at the last few words, cold as ice. Then she stood up, slowly linked her hands in front of her, and remained looking still at the thickly written pages. It seemed impossible to act in any way, and yet for ever in her heart doubt was gone. She was learning a simple but deep truth—that action of any kind removes all possibility of doubt, by bringing it to the test of knowledge and truth. In having read that confession, she had lost all power of doubting how to act. Yet how was she to act? What could she do? Nothing; but she no longer doubted that she ought to do something, and that something was—to for ever expunge his love from her heart and memory.

This was the only legacy that remained to her from all those years of trust and loyalty.

“No, I cannot,” she murmured, shaking her head slowly and gently; “I cannot.”

“When you read this,” the letter ran, “you will renounce me, and I shall deserve it. What more bitter punishment can I have than that knowledge—that you might have loved me, and that I cast that love away?” She read this over two or three times, and each time she shook her head gently, and said aloud, though very low, “No, I cannot.” “The only reparation I can make you is to tell you the whole, plain, un-

varnished truth—I will tell you as gently as I can—and before I begin I swear to you, before the God who made us both, that I never loved any woman but yourself, or led them to believe so, willingly, and that I acted at the time as I truly believed for the best, though now I see I had better tenfold have died. My wrong-doing has been in not having either told you the truth when I first discovered you were not married, as I had been led to believe, or in not at once leaving Charteriss.”

This in substance was what those closely written sheets revealed to her :—

Colonel Myddleton had been attached to the staff of a general well known for his bravery, and also for his beautiful young wife and his intemperate habits.

During the horrors and confusion of the Mutiny, those English who were in any way connected, either by business or interest, became very nearly drawn together, and Colonel Myddleton, in his double character of *aide-de-camp* as well as personal friend of the general to whose staff he was attached, became extremely intimate with Sir Walter Crewe and his young wife, and, under these circumstances, he found himself inevitably mixed up in the private miseries of their lives. The general, though honestly respecting Colonel Myddleton as a soldier, became violently jealous of the brave, self-controlled officer, who now and again had been the unfortunate and wholly innocent spectator of one or two furious scenes



between himself and his wife, and who had once even interfered to protect the terrified girl from his violence—a jealousy, roused and deepened by the openly expressed gratitude and admiration of the inexperienced and highly excitable Lady Crewe. Then at last came a terrible climax. One night, when Colonel Myddleton was standing at the window of his bungalow, in the same compound as Sir Walter's, and only divided from it by a thin belt of shrubs, he was startled and horrified to see Lady Crewe rush across the short intervening space, and in the next instant to find her cowering at his feet, sobbing violently. He raised her instantly, and she clung frantically to him, imploring him to save her from her husband, who, in a sudden fit of furious drunken jealousy, had horse-whipped her before the servants.

Colonel Myddleton was appalled, and stunned for the moment into complete inaction. He could only stand, supporting the miserable girl, who sobbed out her terror in incoherent and hysterical sentences. He saw the scars caused by the whip, and his whole soul revolted from the frightful cruelty and wickedness. At length she fainted, and when he at last succeeded in restoring her to consciousness, he found Sir Walter standing over them.

At this part of the narrative Colonel Myddleton became incoherent, but it appeared that he had somehow sent Lady Crewe to a friend of hers, the wife of a judge, living not far from there ; that the following



day Sir Walter had sent for him, and during the interview had burst a blood vessel, and from that time had only been partially conscious for weeks. Again Colonel Myddleton became involved in his statement, but Hermione gathered that he had effected a reconciliation between husband and wife, that Lady Crewe had gone back to nurse Sir Walter, and he himself had soon after been promoted, and left that part of India. Here the writing changed, and became hurried and almost illegible.

After the Mutiny was quelled and there had been a few months of peace, so that Colonel Myddleton had been able to go on a shooting expedition, he was sent for at Sir Walter's urgent request to come at once, as he was dying. He went. The general, who appeared to be at the point of death, "told me some very sad circumstances of his life, and that of the poor child whom he had married, expressed the most unutterable remorse for all the misery and sorrow he had caused her, and, finally——" Here the writing was scored out, written over, written in again, and at last stood thus, "I pledged my word of honour to marry her, should I be able to win her consent within two years after his death."

Could any woman doubt the meaning of how that promise was obtained? Of course Hermione guessed, and guessed truly, that Sir Walter believed his wife loved Colonel Myddleton, and thought it the only reparation he could make to her. Had he thought

Colonel Myddleton was equally attracted? Had he reason to think so? To that the letter gave no clue. But, after a short struggle, Hermione decided "no" to the last conjecture.

"Hermione!" went on the letter, addressing her for the first time by her name. "When I made that promise, I believed you had been married more than a year; I had gone through sights and scenes that made life's happiness seem a poor thing in comparison with the power to carry out one act of real true kindness to an unhappy and lonely soul. God knows, I did not believe you cared for me, even were you not married. Here, under my hand, was a thing to be done; there, far away in England, a lost dream. I can see now the falsity of it all; but then—then, well I suppose I was demented by the fact of my ideas of helping all the world resolving themselves into the concrete of actual experience of help being needed. There is only this to add. Sir Walter made a marvellous rally, and had so far recovered that, when I returned to England, after my attack of fever, he was likely to live, it might be years; indeed, his life was nearly as good as mine.

"Then I came to Charteriss, and discovered my mistake about you. You need not blame me, Hermione; no words can ever convey to you how I blame myself, or how, through all my life, the consequences of my folly and weakness must prove my punishment. For myself, I have no right to complain, but—oh,

Hermione, do not let me have this to bear still further, that I have darkened your life. I ask nothing, but if in any future, however remote, you could ever feel it possible to say to me, 'I am content; you did, though tardily, act rightly,' I should for ever bless you. I do not venture to repeat to you what I once said to you. I will not mock you by a vain asseveration, but——' The writing stopped, blurred and indistinct, then it began again more clearly. "When I first came to Charteriss I believed his life to be nearly as good as my own, and I could not determine clearly to my own satisfaction, as to whether, in that case, my promise must bind me for ever, for years; and whether, in fact, it would not be more to his honour and my own, to let the whole thing lie a dead letter. I see, now, I should have told you all then. Would to God I had! Once or twice you tried me hard. Then came your dreadful accident. Then I had to go abroad; and when I saw you lying there, nearly dying—well, I *dared* not say more, and you said 'Go,' and I went.

"Then, you know, I heard at Cannes of her widowhood. Sir Walter had died quite suddenly, broken the blood vessel again, and died after three days' unconsciousness. By some means the news had not reached me; she had been a widow nearly a year when she wrote to me on the point of starting for England, and imploring me to come and meet her, believing me to be at my old home in London. I returned, as you know; the *Hydaspes* came in; she

was not on board, but the steward gave me a letter, sent on board at the last minute. I do not understand the ending, there is no signature: it is hurried and incoherent, I fear she may be ill, and—that is all.” Here the page turned. On the other side was written only, “God bless you!”

Yes, that was all. What more remained to be said? What appeal could he make? What request dared he proffer to her after this? None; he made none. Through all, Hermione was struck and held by the exquisite delicacy with which he had hardly ventured to assert he could be much to her, or the loss of his love affect her in any way. His one idea seemed to be to try and soften any anger she might experience from her pride and self-esteem being wounded, from his not having sooner revealed to her the promise by which he had bound himself. The letter was penetrated with the most profound respect and reverence. He did not even plead for forgiveness, because he would not imply that she had cause to forgive. His having acted as he had done, from beginning to end, was the one error of a noble and generous nature, striving to bear on its own behalf the sorrow and the weakness of others. Did she blame him? I think not. Her nature was akin to his. He had meant to act rightly, and she judged in her love, as God judges us: by what he had left undone, not by what he had only partially completed.

So this was the end of all.

She did not cry aloud, nor weep; she was too crushed, too entirely stunned yet to grieve. She sat down at last, and laid her head on the letter, her cold cheek against that supreme farewell of "God bless you!" With all, he was more to her than any other mortal man could ever be, and what a terrible fate was his! Linked by his own act to one, who, however much sinned against and innocent of evil, was yet no fit mate for a character so strong, so self-contained as his. It seemed to her a terrible thing that his life should be so warped in his efforts to do what he considered right. Could it be right that any life should be warped thus? Was it, indeed, being wholly true, either to himself or that poor girl, that he should try to win her and marry her, having nothing to give her but his name? It was a terrible question, and Hermione could not answer it. She was so engrossed in grieving for his wrecked future, and thinking of all he must have gone through, that the idea of her own shadowed life remained in the background for the time being; that was to come on her later. What he must have suffered in writing that explanation, she could imagine; indeed, the only difficulty was to imagine his ever having written it. The complete failure of his ideal life; it must have been bitter pain to him to acknowledge, that in striving to carry out his highest convictions, he had made the most fatal mistake a man is capable of making, not only sacrificing his own happiness, but the happiness of others dependent on him.

She began wondering whether, had she acted differently, it might not have helped him more, but she could not see any way in which she could have served him eventually. No, it had to be, and sooner or later the climax must have been reached.

A great sadness overwhelmed her as she sat thus thinking. He was now far away. She would probably never see him again, or, at least, not for years. They could not even be friends, for, alas! she felt herself that her regard for him was so measureless, that the calm, level ground of friendship was for evermore untenable to either of them. No! he had done well in bidding her farewell—in not seeing her again. How could she tell that she might not have betrayed herself by some word that, to both of them, might have been the cause for after regret. He spoke, indeed, of a possible word from her in future years. Future years! They could have no future! She judged him by her own conviction, and she believed that time would but crystallize her present feelings and render them stronger and more acute, by lopping away all outward expression and thus intensifying their inward vitality. No! what had to be done must be done at once and quickly. She owed him something for having laid bare his heart and life to her. It was strange and, oh, how sad as strange! that they two, who might have lived such a perfect, united life, must never again, by volition, look each other in the face. She got up,



drew a sheet of paper to her, and wrote these few words: "God bless you, for having told me the truth; regret nothing for my sake. I am content that you will act as you think highest and best always." Then she sealed and addressed it and laid it aside. At last, with trembling hands, she lifted his letter, read it through in parts once more, and a few scalding tears fell on the paper now. It was almost, to her, like looking on his dead face. She pressed it tightly to her heart once or twice, trying to recollect his last spoken words to her. How trivial they had been! Only about the cigar; but the expression of his face she remembered vividly—its great pallor and the strung look of each muscle. She stood, sobbing inwardly for a short space of time, like a creature bleeding slowly to its death; then she held the papers to the candle and let them consume to the last ash. When the final spark had expired, and only a tiny mound of quivering and pulsating tinder remained, she knelt long, staring fixedly at that, till a gasping sigh sent it flying up in a dim cloud of pearly atoms, which descended like snow on her hair and face. Then her heart seemed to break suddenly, the frost gave way, her face fell in her twisted hands, and she cried, with an exceeding bitter cry, "No! I cannot—cannot!"



## CHAPTER XXVII.

MISS BARBARA was early abroad, she was going down the village buying eggs. What she did with all the eggs she bought no one had ever discovered. It was popularly supposed she buried them, lest there should be too many chickens, it being a well-known and uncontested fact that she highly disapproved of all young things.

On her prowls this morning she passed the cottages of two old men who lived side by side, though each had their separate garden ground. Samuel Providence was not out; but old Houghton was delving away, with commendable energy. Now, Houghton was the parish clerk and sexton, and a man of curious and stiff convictions; nearly as bristly in speech as his rusty, scratch wig was in growth. Few, indeed, of his equals dared to address him in conversation and hardly any of his superiors cared to do so, for, as he said, "He wer like the Lard —no respecter of persons."

Miss Fairfax had, a few months ago, given him

some plants, and she was anxious to know how they were thriving. She stopped, therefore, in front of the little, low wooden fence and peered over. Houghton went on delving away, without paying the slightest heed to her appearance, any more, indeed not so much, as he would have done had she been a fly buzzing round him. But Miss Barbara was the last person to stand idling and silent. She looked keenly round the small enclosure and saw, to her anger, that the plants, which had been so healthy when first bestowed on the unworthy recipient, were growing in a remote corner and almost choked by weeds.

“Houghton!” she said, sternly. “Do you expect that, because you are the village clerk, Providence will look after your garden for you, if you don’t attend to it yourself? Fie! you might be a tramp, an idle fellow, to let those plants go to ruin in that fashion!”

“Providence, indeed! d—— Providence!” said the irate and insulted clerk, alluding to his neighbour and believing him to be the agent apostrophized by his whilom benefactress. “Why, he can’t make his own garden grow, let alone mine.”

“Wretched man!” answered Miss Barbara, bouncing with indignation. “How dare you be so profane? Do you not dread the Almighty’s vengeance?”

“Why should the Almighty pay more heed to Sam than me?” demanded the incensed sexton. “If I choose to make and mend my own garden, which I

know well how, considering I be continual at other folk'ses"—with a grim smile—"I see no call for Providence to come poking his nose in my plot afore my time comes."

Sudden light began to dawn on Miss Barbara. She shook her mittened hands gravely together, as one who should beat dust from off a moral shoe, and said, "Your language is always so uncouth that I failed, at first, to catch your meaning."

"It wasn't far to go, then," muttered Houghton, sulkily, digging with renewed vigour; "while he only lives next door."

"What I meant to say was, that it was a pity you let those plants be so choked with weeds."

No answer was vouchsafed to this remark; but the man went angrily across the plot of ground and pulled up a weed or two, muttering inaudibly. Miss Barbara, judging she had better retire with honours, walked slowly on her way.

"Weeds, indeed! a pretty one she be a-rearing of that poor, puling girl-child, looking, for all the world, like my sparrer-grass!" was the taunt flung after her. But Miss Barbara did not hear, being occasionally conveniently deaf.

She walked on, ruminating on the general ingratitude of the human race, a subject prolific of wide and branching displeasure and irritation, when brought into personal relation with ourselves and our own immediate beneficent deeds.

Whilst thus absorbed, and nearly lost to general view as far as the light of her countenance might beam, by her soup-dish hat, she was brought to bay by a loud snort, and looking forward a little, perceived a huge sow charging down the village at her.

Miss Barbara stopped, for a mad pig, hunted by a rabble of boys and men, is not exactly an object pleasant to meet, even though your mind may have been strongly braced by an introspective and caustic review of mortal ingratitude. Looking fixedly at the furious animal, Miss Barbara began to feel a vague distrust of its intentions, and to harbour a weak and feminine longing for the shelter of old Houghton's garden palings, even though there should lurk behind them a whole forest of weeds. The sow came on, and—Miss Barbara fled !

It was a strange and awful sight : an elderly lady in full flight, a mad pig, and a rout of men and boys. In spite of her stiff and gaunt appearance, Miss Fairfax had great speed, and she had not lived all her life in the country without being well aware that a pig in anger is a terrible beast to face defenceless. She gathered her robes tightly round her, more with a view to getting them out of the way than to elegance of arrangement, and her little cardinal cape flying out widely she looked not so very unlike a heron on a windy day, being mobbed by small birds. It became very much a question of who could hold out longest, when she saw Tubal Partridge rushing to the rescue

with a flail he had been mending. Alas ! for Miss Barbara's dignity ! She turned to see how near was the enemy, tripped on a rolling stone, and fell flat at Tubal's feet ; who, trying to avoid falling over her, lost his balance, came down on one knee, and brought the flail down, with a resounding thwack, on Miss Barbara's widespread skirts, making the dust fly in clouds, and causing her to emit a yell of terror and surprise that echoed and re-echoed. The climax was sublime. With an alacrity, unparalleled in the village annals, Miss Barbara, feeling assured it was the sow intent on mutilating her best paramatta, twisted herself round, up, and into a sitting posture with face to foe, and two large boots staring, with their broad and dusty soles, straight at the amazed pig ; who, not having a soul large enough to cope with such sudden and unexpected reverses of fortune and persons, stopped dead, uttered a startled grunt ending in a squeal, gave an indignant and protesting curl to her tail, as one who should comment in strong terms on such astounding tactics, and finally turned round and fairly ran in the opposite direction. The mob followed.

Miss Barbara, without rising, turned and cast an inquiring gaze at Tubal, who, too astounded and dumbfounded by his own unpremeditated assault on Miss Fairfax to laugh, had picked himself up and was regarding the offending weapon with a reproachful and wistful eye.

“Tubal!” said Miss Barbara, rather slowly. “Is it very hard?”

“I fear she be!” was the answer, in a rueful tone.

To another than the simple blacksmith, the lady’s question might have appeared slightly ironical.

“I think it must be. Pray look at the hole it has made in the road where it struck,” said she, with still greater gravity than before.

“The Heavens be praised!” quoth Tubal, by which he meant that praise was due on account of the flail’s not having struck her head.

“Give me your hand!” she said, with dignity. He did so, and she rose with a little stiffness, for she had experienced a severe shake.

The smithy was not far from there, and she yielded to his solicitation to go and rest for a while. Indeed, she was so far moved from her ordinary self-reliance that when the sturdy man of iron proposed accompanying her as far as her own gate, flail and all, she accepted his escort, and arrived at home some little time before she had been expected.

Knowing Miss Barbara’s ordinary ideas relative to Tubal, Mr. Fairfax was not a little surprised to see his sister shake hands with the smith, and actually to overhear her offer him some beer. But his astonishment culminated when Miss Barbara came into his den and, sitting down all dusty and shaking, said, in a quivering voice—

“Dux, I have been in great peril!”



"My dear!" he said, turning round, with great sympathy.

"I have been pursued by a mad pig. They should not allow mad pigs to run through the village, Giles. I believe it was one of General Watt's," added his sister, in tones which implied that had the sow belonged to that gentleman it would greatly have aggravated the offence.

"What a dangerous thing!" said Mr. Fairfax, looking more closely at Miss Barbara. "I do trust it did not come near you?"

"I am not quite sure," said she. "Something came very near me. Tubal says it was the flail."

"Flail?"

"Yes; how dense you are!" retorted Miss Barbara, suddenly recovering her asperity and her breath together. "He brought a flail to rescue me. It was highly dangerous, it might have killed me." And she fell into a muse as to whether the flail had struck her or not. Whether flail or pig, remained a mystery. Suddenly she burst out, "But for all that, I will not say that he did those blind-rollers properly. How can you expect it if he runs about so handily with flails?" Now this was gross ingratitude on Miss Barbara's part, for there can be little doubt that, had the sudden appearance of Tubal not caused her involuntary downfall, the pig had not been routed.

"What became of the pig?" said Mr. Fairfax, mildly.



“How should I know? Do you think I ran after it and asked its intentions?” said his sister, sharply. “I am sure it was General Watt’s. He always has those horrid, long-legged things. That comes of sending your sons away, to manage other people’s affairs, when you can’t manage your own.” And then Miss Barbara retired to change her dress.

This was Josline’s last day at Old Court, and she and her uncle clung together through the short hours that seemed to fly with such frightful rapidity. Mr. Crosbie came in the evening, and the two violins discoursed sweet music.

Josline was to go early to rest; but her uncle was very anxious she should sing “Auf Wiedersehen!” if possible. She thought she could and tried; but, whether from grief or fatigue, her voice was so low as to be an echo only.

Mr. Crosbie came to her. “Look here!” he said, gently closing the notes. “You go and say good night to your uncle, and I’ll play it on my ‘wind-box,’ as Miss Barbara calls it.”

Josline got up without a word, and went and sat on the arm of Mr. Fairfax’s chair, leaning her head against his. Her aunt was upstairs, engaged in some mysterious preparations for the morrow’s journey.

The kind old godfather sat him down, with his back to them, and, nearly laying his head flat on his fiddle, he went dreamily on. Mr. Fairfax drew her nearer and nearer to him, straining his arm round her

slender waist, and clasping both her cold, small hands in his own. They never spoke. It was a mute farewell. Still the violin went on, weaving sound into exquisite melody, and those two loving hearts seemed to talk to each other so. They were facing the lily's heart, and the sweet, spiritual face of Josline looked nearly as shadowy as did that ethereal representation of her.

"It will never be quite the same again, my child, my Anima!" he whispered, suddenly, a prescience of coming change overshadowing him.

"No!" she breathed softly, in return. Then, leaning still lower, she kissed his eyes, her supreme form of caress. "How good you have always been to me, Dux!" And that was all—an acknowledgment and a requital.

Miss Barbara and Mrs. Turgoose were routing round Josline's room when she came up.

"At last! to bed!" was her aunt's address. "Now, child, see how neatly I have arranged your things for you!" She lifted a dress or two in speaking, and showed that inside each body a text, worked in scarlet marking cotton, was neatly sewn. "How do we know to what sort of place you may be going? Miss St. John told me it was very lonely. There may be no church!"

Josline smiled faintly and sat down on the edge of her little bed, pressing her hand over her chest. Mrs. Turgoose laid the last little book in the trunk and,

with a curtsey, departed. Miss Barbara remained, folding and unfolding a pocket-handkerchief, apparently wanting to say something that she found great difficulty in getting out. At last, with a rush, she said, sternly—

“Now, Josline, no nonsense, give me that Popish thing!”

Josline did not move. Her large eyes dilated with a terrified expression, and she grew very pale; but she drew up her slender feet under her, as though, like a sensitive creature, she were preparing for a desperate and lasting struggle.

“Do you hear me, Josline?” said Miss Barbara, whose own heart beat rather loudly; but who was quite determined to have her own way in this, as the testing touch of her waning power over her niece. And her determination, in spite of her slightly vibrating voice, pierced through everything, and made itself felt on Josline’s mind, as a hard blow might have shivered her where she sat, without, however, causing her actually to fall. Her vivid imagination and her intense unity of idea had never suffered her to forget the influence her young and beautiful mother had acquired over her heart and mind, in those few years in which they had been together. It would have been possible to grind Josline’s will to powder, and yet one crystal would have remained—her devotion to her mother’s memory. It was the one essential strength of that lovely but fragile character.

"Do you hear me, child?" said Miss Barbara, harshly, advancing on her niece. Josline curled her feet a little more tightly round each other, and placed both hands over her breast, where lay her treasure. She did not speak, but she looked, and Miss Barbara paused, for, though hard, she was not cruel, and something in the desperate energy of that look curdled round her heart. However, it was the test, and she must not fail herself. "Well, come!" she said, putting out one bony hand.

"You must tear my heart out first," said Josline, in a voice so strained and small, that it was hardly to be called a voice, it was more a tone.

Miss Barbara was utterly appalled. Such language addressed to her by that gentle and submissive girl, who had never said a rough, much less a violent word in her life! She fell back a pace or two, literally too astounded to speak. How the scene might have ended can never be known, for at that instant there was a gentle tap at the door, and Mr. Fairfax's voice said, "May I come in?"

Receiving no answer, he concluded Josline to be asleep, and opened the door with extreme caution, and the next instant Josline was in his arms, not crying, but trembling so frightfully and convulsively that he feared her spirit and body would be sundered.

"Hush! hush!" he said, gathering her up. "What is the matter, my darling child? I am here, close to you; you shall not go, if you do not wish."

“Oh!” shuddered Josline, leaning back and looking as though she were dying; “do not leave me, do not leave me!”

But now Miss Barbara, too, had recovered. She advanced on them in the most extreme wrath. “Let her go, Dux!” she said. “She is an idolatress, a Popish heathen, she wears a crucifix; make her give it up.”

Mr. Fairfax folded her the closer, whilst Josline strained against him till it seemed as though she would be suffocated. She looked up in his eyes with the look he remembered in her mother’s when she died, and she sobbed exhaustedly, “Dux will help!” They had been her mother’s words, and he did not flinch or fail.

“God bless you for your trust!” he said; “I will help.”

“Dux, do you mean to say you will not make her yield up that wicked, blasphemous toy?” said Miss Barbara, whose anger now rose to such a pitch that she could hardly articulate.

“I mean, Barbara, that anything a mother has given her child, holding sacred, is, and must ever remain sacred, and God forbid I should touch it even to profane it by thought, word, or deed.”

“You always were taken in by that——” Miss Barbara stopped. Josline had drawn forth the crucifix, and was pressing it against her uncle’s lips with frantic love and self-surrender.

"I wash my hands of you both this night and for ever," said the outraged aunt, and she stalked out of the room.

It was, indeed, long before Mr. Fairfax could soothe or calm the excited and trembling girl. At last he induced her to lie down on the bed, and, drawing the warm silk coverlet over her, he sat there holding her hand till the night was well over. She shuddered and sobbed at intervals, but his presence calmed her, and at last she slept.

Much as he would miss her, he felt now that Miss St. John's taking her away was most providential, and he trusted that before she came back he might have found some means of mediating between her aunt and herself. He thought for long that night over many things. Was all this devotion of Josline to her mother's memory mere love and reverence for the mother's faith, as having been her mother's? or, would greater things grow out of it? In the stillness of that summer night more things grew clear to him than had ever before been the case. Sitting there by the quiet sleeper, looking so like death; hearing only the sigh of the wind through the creepers at the window, the hushing of the great trees that bounded the garden, seeing now and then a star fall down the zenith, earthly things seemed dim and little worth; God's future, all.

What, after all, was creed and observance? Did we any of us love our earthly fathers in equal measure,



with identical outward demonstration?—and still they complained not that each child spoke not nor acted alike. Would God our Father in Heaven? Again, with wider fulness of meaning, with deeper and more divine significance, came to him those words: “There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” And then again these: “There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. Therefore, if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.”

O Voices least understood by us! might it not be possible that God would thereafter touch those lips with coals of fire, and give them utterance that should make all life thereafter bear a different interpretation to us and to them?



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

“ THEN we shall all meet again before so very long ? ” were the parting words of Lady Clinton.

“ And mind, we expect Myddleton will come back here and come on with us,” said Sir Philip. “ He hasn’t refused, has he ? ”

“ No,” answered Hermione. “ I suppose it is left open.”

“ All right, we’ll bring him.”

It was, for the time being, the last struggle Miss St. John had to make, and well for her, indeed, it was so. She was nearly at the end of her self-control.

She did not get out at Old Court, judging it more kind to stay in the carriage and let them say their farewell alone.

Presently they came down the little walk : Josline led by her uncle, Miss Barbara walking sternly in the rear, Mrs. Turgoose and Phœbe wiping their eyes in the hall, the gardener and his boy carrying the small trunk.

Hermione leant eagerly forward with outstretched, welcoming hands, her whole heart full of sympathy. Josline was lily white, looking infinitely more delicate and fragile than the last time she had seen her, indeed the scene of the preceding night had told on her with fearful force and with far deeper injury than was at all apparent.

She tried to smile when Hermione nearly took her in her arms in drawing her into the carriage, but the movement of the lips became convulsive. She clung to her uncle's arm and hand as though she could never let go, and her eyes were brimming with tears; words were inaudible.

"God bless you!" he said, wringing Miss St. John's hand. "She is very precious to us, or otherwise we could not have let her go."

"No; I see, I understand," she answered. "Good-bye, Miss Barbara, thank you very much for trusting her to me, I trust she may be happy."

Josline kept her eyes fixed on her uncle's face with an almost agonized expression of love and terror. Miss Barbara sniffed; she had intended to reveal to Miss St. John there and then the enormity of the crucifix, but even her heart relented and its anger died before that trembling anguish.

"Kiss me, child," she said, approaching the carriage door. "I believe you mean no harm." She pressed the burning, tear-stained cheek lightly with her own, and something in the warm contact stirred

her heart with unusual feeling. "There, forget and forgive," she added magnanimously. "You will come back in a different mind, I dare say."

Mr. Fairfax took the small head in his two hands and kissed her fervently, then he retreated a little, and waved a farewell from the step. Miss Barbara stood with hands behind her, tippeting backwards and forwards. Hermione caught one of the cold, clay-like hands, and grasped it firmly, and they were off. With her other hand Josline clenched the edge of the carriage door till her fingers were as white as her face, but she did not speak as they whirled round the corner and out of sight. Tubal and Nan stood with the baby, watching. Nan flung a bunch of sweet flowers, which missed their mark and lay unseen in the dust, and they were gone.

Looking at the two faces, so still, so silent, it would have been hard to say which was whitest, which mouth and eyes looked the sadder. And yet there was a vast difference in the two expressions. On Hermione's all expression was fixed, on Josline's all was in transition. The one had gone through suffering, the other was going into it. Dux had gone back to his den, but even his violin was mute for him to-day, and as to the lily heart, the pathos of those pictured eyes drove him well-nigh crazy. Miss Barbara wandered aimlessly about the house, and at length, taking up puss, she came into her brother's room. She had lost with Josline occupation and

thought, and, with the ceasing of Hermione's visits, heart and excitement.

She thought Miss St. John looking so excessively ill that she wanted to hear Dux say something about it, as we are apt to feel a nervous longing to fret an irritating wound; but he made no remark of any kind, and seemed only intent on setting in order his cabinet of intaglios. At last she said, "Did you notice anything about Miss St. John, Dux?" a little timidly for her, which simply meant that the tone of her voice was a little less acid than usual.

"No, nothing," he answered, absently.

"No, I suppose not," this with a sniff and huff of her shoulders. "Well, she looked very ill; I dare say she is going to have cholera."

"You don't say so!" (from the startled brother). "But then, Barbara, how could you let Josline go with her?"

"Because, I dare say, she isn't going to have any such thing," calmly, "though, indeed, Josline might as well have cholera as a crucifix, I think," with sudden heat and irrelevancy.

Mr. Fairfax shrugged his shoulders with a patient sigh. He saw Miss Barbara was in one of her tiffs, and judged it more wise to let her have her fretting out, besides having but little spirit for argument at that moment. Doubtless, she was venting her sorrow at Josline's loss on him, and the patient man sat still, determined to bear anything on that score, for his

own heart felt only too sore. Women had strange ways of showing grief and care—might this not be one of them?

“Supposing it is cholera, what is a good preventive?” continued his sister, seeing that the idea annoyed him, and anxious he should suffer uneasiness as well as herself.

“I don’t know—time,” he answered, thinking only of Josline’s absence, and of what would heal it.

“You are quite foolish,” retorted Miss Barbara. “And I think you look rather like cholera, yourself!”

“I dare say,” he answered. “Choler, choleric, choleraic.”

Miss Fairfax stared grimly, then pursued, “Nothing is so inducive as melancholy and vapours. The village is full of miasma, and there are two cases near Crumb’s Bottom.”

It will be observed that Miss Barbara’s statements were slightly involved. Mr. Fairfax continued arranging his specimens.

“Do you mean to answer me, or not?” said the irate sister.

“Yes, my dear; what do you want me to say?”

“I might as well talk to a sheep,” retorted she, and left him in peace.

Later on, Mr. Crosbie came and sat with him, and they talked over the flitting of their darling. They neither of them hoped any real good from her going, and yet, too, in their hearts they clung to the belief

that something might be gained. Mr. Crosbie told the uncle that Miss St. John had spoken to Lady Dunstable of going abroad for the following spring, and of her wish to take Josline with her; and he smiled and shook his head slowly.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

GREAT were the preparations at Enderby. In the little "pearl" chamber, everything had been prepared and overlooked with the most loving care by Mrs. Match, and, indeed, she had called Robert into consultation as to the hanging or unhangings of pictures, etc., and so often had he come in and out that he believed nothing, however trivial, or however necessary, had escaped his notice, from the lace pin-cushion on the dressing-table, to the pearly satin and swan's-down trimmed coverlet of the bed. It was a perfect little chamber, fit even for Josline.

At last, they were coming—they could hear the distant wheels rolling up the rhododendron drive. The chocolate was bubbling on its silver stand, the lamp near the sofa was shaded to a nicety, the windows were wide open, you could hear the faint washing of the river, and the moonlight lay on tree and flower. Mrs. Match and Robert went into the hall; they were close now. Mrs. Match rubbed her hands gently to



and fro; Robert, looking rather pale, stepped from flag to flag of the chequered marble. The carriage stopped, and before the servants could get down, Robert was at the door, saying, in a husky voice, "How late you are!"

"Hush!" said Miss St. John's voice. "She is asleep, do you think you could carry her?"

In a moment he had her in his arms, and his fragile burden was across the hall and safely on the sofa before she awoke. He was suffocating with happiness at carrying her and awe at the change in her. Mrs. Match had never seen her before, and Hermione had become accustomed to her fragility; but on Robert it burst like a storm in the midst of a sunshiny day, and he was so dreadfully overcome that he was absolutely speechless.

Hermione, quick in love and sympathy saw it directly; she feared for his self-control and Josline's excitement, so she gave him a hasty sign to leave the room; and then, unfastening the wraps she had put round the delicate girl, she said, "Now, don't you think you will let me take you to your room, dear?"

Josline was much too shy to refuse, though she longed intensely to see Robert again. They crossed the hall where he was giving orders, but he resolutely kept his back turned to them, and they went upstairs, Hermione remarking, quite casually—

"Robert will come up to-morrow morning, with lots of papers and things; he is always so busy, and such a help."

Josline made no answer. At last, she was partially undressed, for Miss St. John had begged her to go to bed and rest, and she turned now to bid her good night.

"See," she said, half opening a door, "in this sitting-room I burn a little lamp all night, on the other side is my room. I will leave my door open, so you will be very 'safe,' as Gladys says." Josline smiled faintly. Then Hermione bent over her as she sat in the big chair, and kissing her gently, she said, "Good night, my dearest, I hope you will be happy here, and stay as long as you can."

Josline looked at her, wistfully. "You look very pale," she whispered. "Do you mind my coming and not being strong?" and she held out one of her small, delicate hands.

"Mind!" said Hermione. She paused, then added, hastily, "I only care for one thing, to try and make you happy. Good night, my darling!" She kissed her again, and left her. As she hurried downstairs to the bay chamber, she wondered at herself, and at the intense interest she took in this fragile girl, who seemed in so short a time to have wound herself round the tenderest feelings of her heart and life. Josline was the only link with her beautiful dead and buried past, but Hermione dared not let herself realize that fact.

Robert had been waiting for her in the hall. "Oh, Miss St. John——" he began, and then stopped, for his quivering lips refused further utterance.

“You are too anxious,” she said, hastily and kindly. “I forgot you had not seen her for some time, but indeed, she is much better than she has been; the journey and excitement have knocked her up, she will look quite different to-morrow, after a good night’s rest.”

“Do you think so?” he said, unconvinced, for the sudden shock of her altered appearance had taken too great a hold on him to be easily dispelled.

Hermione tried hard to comfort him, and they went together into the bay chamber, where Mrs. Match sat, still waiting patiently. There was, of course, a great deal to talk over and arrange, and it was very late before Robert went home to the stewardry.

He walked fast in the cool night, with his heart hot and aching. How could they call her “pretty well,” and “better,” when she looked unlike any living thing he had ever seen? Had she known she was so ill when she refused him, then? No, that had been before her illness and Gabriel’s death; and they attributed the whole of her delicacy to her having caught so severe a chill the afternoon they had been overtaken by the thunderstorm. It was too hard to bear; first to lose his friend, then to tremble for Josline’s life. The young man’s eyes filled with angry and anxious tears. Somehow, the look about her, to-night, had brought back vividly to him the loss he had sustained in Gabriel Vannier. Why was

it that those two always seemed woven together by such subtle links that he could not dissociate them? It filled him with a vague, yet all-engrossing fear for Josline. He began to believe, not only fear, that the young artist's death would involve that of Josline, or otherwise why could he not keep them apart and distinct in his thoughts? Of course, no one could see as clearly as he did about her, for they, none of them, loved her as he did. Ah! if only they would let him marry her, and keep her, and love her his best, they would soon see how strong, and well, and bright she would grow. Why, even Miss St. John, who was so kind and thoughtful about her too, did not in the least realize how ill she must be, to look like that. He began to wonder what was the matter with *her*, by-the-by, she looked very ill too. Now he began to think things over a little more generally, and how absent she was, and how short in speaking! Well, the whole world was all wrong, and he was convinced nothing would right it till everybody married the right person.

He was wrong too, about Hermione's want of perception as regarded Josline. She did see how excessively ill the young girl was. It had never dawned on her with its ultimate possible, nay, she began to fear only too certain ending, till she saw her next morning; the journey appeared to have been a crisis, and to have entirely absorbed the remains of strength the insidious disease had slowly been withdrawing from her.

It was not that she was pale now. For the first time fever had set in, and the colour that burnt in her delicate cheeks was unearthly in its beauty, and gave her so false an air of health and vigour, that Robert's heart went up like quicksilver, in the crimson tide that dyed her very brow on seeing him. Hermione's sank like a stone. All day she watched the gentle, languid movements, the brilliant light in the wistful eyes; and her heart thrilled to every slight, husky echo of the cough, which now was incessant. Had she only brought her to Enderby to die? She saw Mrs. Match was watching her too, and once or twice their eyes met. Was it possible that she had appeared as ill as this to the Fairfaxes, and that yet they had let her leave them? Hermione forgot that they had lived with Josline from the beginning of her illness, and that she had gradually grown feebler and feebler without their noticing it so forcibly as she did now. Also the turn for the worse since her journey had been excessively rapid, as is sometimes the case, when apparently a far slighter cause than that move from home, with all its excitement and emotion, would have acted quite as perniciously. Miss St. John decided to wait a few days, and watch; then to send for Sir Henry, her own physician, from town, as though for the purpose of consulting him herself, and induce Josline to see him. Gradually the extreme languor seemed to yield to rest, love, change of air and scene, and extreme care as to fatigue; but the

sleepless nights, the hollow, wearing cough, the brilliant colour continued ; and it appeared possible almost daily to observe the increased delicacy of look.

The press of business was extreme. Miss St. John was on horseback half the day, riding over the estate with Robert, or deeply engrossed in papers and leases, and building and draining plans ; she was terracing the lower part of the garden, too, and was in and out with the workmen a hundred times a day. Work ! work ! no time to think or dream, was all she craved for. Something active and insistent, that would not brook postponement, so that she must always be employed in actual achievement, and have no time, even at night, to rest and meditate. She felt it was her only chance, and she at once seized it and carried it out. Too tired at night by actual bodily fatigue to do more than steal in, kiss Josline softly, if sleeping, or read her a few quiet verses ; place a few grapes by her, retrim the little lamp, and then leave her, if awake, soothed and calmed. She thanked God day and night for bodily health and strength that enabled her to act thus ; and day by day she felt more drawn to the fragile girl, who had none such to help her in her struggle ; for that she was undergoing some mental misery, Hermione was only too sorrowfully convinced. Before she had seen Josline and Robert together, she had half doubted whether Josline loved him, but no doubt was any longer possible. Could it not be brought to pass, then, that they should be happy ?



Hermione longed for this with a fervour and intensity she had never thought she could feel again about anything. She had never approached the subject with Josline. Something in the fragile look, in the extreme childlikeness of her demeanour deterred her; and Hermione, who was so naturally reserved herself, could not realize the relief it might be to a nature so clinging as Josline's, to reveal its secret, and be soothed and sympathized with.

Day by day she observed, with the keen acuteness of fellow-suffering, that both Robert and Josline were losing control, and drifting more and more towards each other. That strong, brave character of his was eminently calculated for so delicate a nature as Josline's to lean against. The very look of the tall, sturdy, athletic figure, gave one a feeling of force and power, which must be irresistibly attractive to so nervous an organization as hers. Hermione found herself praying for a happy termination to the attachment whenever she saw the two together.



## CHAPTER XXX.

SIR HENRY came down from London. One day at luncheon a carriage drove up, and he was announced. Robert, who had come in unexpectedly, started violently; a dreadful pang shot through his heart. Was Josline worse, then? she had seemed better these last few days. Miss St. John rose to receive him. Josline merely looked up, flushed and shy. No, evidently it was not for her, and his heart beat more quietly.

"I am very glad to see you, Sir Henry," said Hermione, with a sort of half-surprised look; for, indeed, he had come the day before she expected him.

"It is very kind of you," he answered, shaking hands with her, and with a quick, inclusive look round the table. Perhaps his eye lingered a little on Josline—at least, it seemed so to Robert's jealous scrutiny; but he turned quickly to his hostess again. "I happened to be not so very far from here, so I thought, as you have often kindly asked me to come,

I would just spend the night here, if you will give me house-room?"

"It is very kind of you," said Hermione, immensely relieved by his ready tact. "Allow me to introduce my dear old friend, Mrs. Match, whom I think you have met before. Mr. Robert Watt, you know, don't you—when I was so ill at Charteriss? and then Miss Josline Fairfax."

Sir Henry bowed slowly and ceremoniously to each in turn. He was tall and grave-looking, with grey hair and a clear, penetrating eye. Apparently, he was not a man of many words, for he made no remark, but, sitting down by the side of Miss St. John, he ate a very good luncheon in almost total silence.

After luncheon they went into the drawing-room, and after a little casual conversation, Sir Henry said, "I have not much time, Miss St. John; suppose you take me over the gardens."

She acquiesced, and they went out. Robert had gone straight from the dining-room back to the stewardry. Mrs. Match was busy upstairs, and Josline sat back in a deep chair by the open window, and watched Sir Henry and Hermione strolling under the cedars, and apparently absorbed in conversation about the improvements. They certainly were very much interested; they stopped, talked, nodded their heads, and went on again; then Sir Henry appeared to be drawing diagrams on the turf, and at last they

sat down under one of the great trees, in the shade, with their backs to her. The heat was intense.

Josline drowsily looked out for a little longer, feeling too languid to do anything ; then her delicate head fell on one side, like a flower over-weighted with dew, and she slept. She often did this now, and almost unconsciously, too ; it was a kind of balance against the restless, sleepless nights. Sir Henry, who had turned round two or three times, and who had expected this, at last ceased talking, made a sign to Hermione, and they both got up, trod gently and silently over the turf, and came to the window, where they stood looking in on the unconscious sleeper. The physician was quiet for some little time, intently regarding the sleeping girl, holding his chin with one hand, and resting the elbow on the other folded arm.

“ It is impossible to tell accurately without sounding her,” he whispered at last. “ I think I have a plan that might induce her to allow me to do so, without alarming her. Will you wake her gently ? I will stay here.”

Hermione, a little pale, went in at the window, and, bending down, kissed Josline softly on the forehead. She awoke instantly, hardly aware she had been asleep.

Sir Henry immediately entered the room, and came up to her, holding out his hand. “ Miss Fairfax,” he said, in a gentle and most kindly voice,

“allow me to shake hands with you, I find I knew your dear mother very well.”

Josline sat up, looking at him a little startled. Back in a tide came a host of memories. She remembered him now; this was the tall, stately young doctor who had come to see her mother when she was dying, and who, when Miss Barbara had wanted to force her away from the room, had carried her back in his arms, and forbidden any one to touch her.

“Oh! I remember you, I do,” she said, earnestly. “Only——”

“I look so old, don’t I?” he said, smiling. “Well, you see, I forgot you, too, so we must both forgive each other.”

Josline put her hand in his, her small hand, burning with fever and excitement.

He took it, and retained it, feeling the rapid, leaping pulse. “I don’t think you look quite so strong as you did then,” he went on. “Have you been ill?”

“Yes,” she answered, trembling a little, she scarcely knew why, and still holding his eyes with her mournful, intense gaze. How he brought back to her her dying mother. Her mouth was quivering, and the tears began to flow. Then she began to cough.

It was a more severe fit than Hermione had ever heard. Sir Henry made no remark; he still retained her hand—

“Ah!” he observed, when it was ended, and she

lay back rather faint. "That tires you, doesn't it? Supposing I give you something to lull it a little."

"Yes, I shouldn't mind," she gasped, simply. "I think it worries Miss St. John."

Hermione's eyes were full of tears.

"Well, then, supposing you let me listen a little; I won't hurt you. You know I used to listen to your mother." And with a rapid movement he was on his knees, and had applied a stethoscope to her chest.

Josline put out one hand to Hermione, who held it closely. A very few seconds sufficed for Sir Henry. He made no remark when he rose from his knees, but said, with a little, slow smile when Miss St. John looked anxiously at him—

"Oh, yes! we can lull the cough; and Miss Josline must please be very good, and do as she is bid. I remember she used to be very good when she was so high," and he measured from the floor with his hand.

Josline smiled, too.

"Do you like being here?" he asked, after a minute or two, holding his hands clasped in front of him, and looking dreamily out of the window.

"Yes; very much, indeed. You don't know how kind she is," said Josline, timidly.

"Yes, I do," he answered, nodding. Then, with apparent irrelevancy, he said, with quite a different intonation and with startling energy, "Why, Miss St. John, I see a boat-house. Now, if there is a thing I do love, it is a row. May I? Will you come, too,

and see how well I can pull? You know this is my holiday, and I mean to make the most of it." He did not wait for an answer, but went quickly out of the window, and down to the river, under the cedars.

Hermione stooped, kissed Josline tenderly, and said, "Isn't he kind? You didn't mind, did you?"

"Oh, yes! Oh, no! He knew mamma!" said Josline, with dewy eyes.

"Yes, darling; we found that out quite by accident. I must go, now. Stay and rest till we come to tea."

They got out the boat, and drifted down the river for some little time in silence. It was a most exquisite afternoon, and under the hanging trees was cool and delicious. There was no sound but the rise and fall of the oars in the rowlocks, no movement but the deeper sway of the river weeds in the ripple they made in passing, or the swift spinning away of some long-legged water-insect on their approach. All nature slept in the heat and haze. Some haunting dread of her fears being confirmed, kept Hermione silent, and Sir Henry appeared lost in thought. At last, he drew a deep breath, and holding the oars under each arm, so that they drifted with the current, he passed his hand swiftly over his face, grasped his chin, and said—

"Well, it's the mother over again. I give her two or three months!"

"Oh!" said Hermione, shivering from head to foot. "How dreadful! I didn't think this!"



“ So it is,” he said ; and then, rapidly and briefly, he ran over the whole case, recapitulating all Miss St. John had told him ; that which had been told her by others during her stay at Charteriss, and what she had herself observed. He said he didn’t believe she could last longer than to the end of the autumn ; he thought the first frost would prove fatal, but that it was impossible to judge with perfect accuracy, on account of her youth, and the care she was now experiencing. Then he paused, thought a little, and said—

“ May I speak with perfect frankness ? ”

Hermione could not utter a word. She held out her trembling hands, imploringly.

“ You know we physicians see a good deal,” he went on. “ That child is breaking her heart about something. Well, make her happy. I do not say it is possible. Try. Anyhow, get her to talk, if she has not already done so. Give her what she wants. I have known cases like hers, under the influence of happiness, rally and go on for months ; in one case for years. Yet do not deceive yourself,” he added, gravely ; “ she is doomed. You may make her happy and prolong her life, but you cannot save it ; the spring of her young vitality is broken.” He paused again, without looking at Hermione, who, with her face buried in her hands, was crying silently. He let the oars sink back into the water, and rowed quietly on. “ You see,” he pursued, “ if you can



make her happy, you may save her for a while ; and yet, why should you try this ?” he ended, musingly, half to himself. “ She had better fade away into a better land.”

Silently, for Miss St. John made no answer, they glided down the river reaches.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

THE next day, early, Sir Henry left Enderby, and Hermione had one more load added to her heavy burden. He had promised to write to Mr. Fairfax, and tell him the exact state of the case, advising him at the same time to leave Josline where she was, as Old Court was excessively damp, and Enderby appeared to suit her admirably as regarded climate and companionship.

For the next few days Miss St. John cast about in her mind as to how she could possibly approach the subject she was longing to open to Josline.

Robert had questioned her in a distant way as to Sir Henry's opinion about Josline ; but Hermione had been very guarded in her answers, judging it not right to disclose much until she heard from Mr. Fairfax. She, too, had written to him, begging him to come to Enderby if he felt the slightest inclination to do so, and saying that there was nothing in the world she would not do to please and be of service to Josline.

Matters remained as they were for about ten days. Hermione had postponed the "house-warming," alleging, as a reason, that the grounds could not be finished in time for the illumination, and she had written a long letter to Charteriss, begging them to forgive her if she had upset their plans. She heard from Lady Clinton, expressing regret, but saying it did not in reality signify; that Sir Vere Temple had had an appointment offered him, most unexpectedly, at the Horse Guards, and that, as the wedding would therefore take place rather sooner than had been determined, they would go up to London for the joyful occasion, and then hold themselves in readiness to come down to Enderby whenever Miss St. John expected them. Mina wrote in an effusive style, saying she would not give up seeing Enderby, though thirty Sir Veres interposed, and if Hermione would only wait a little, they would come on their wedding tour. Gladys wrote a short, melancholy note, longing to come, and very much disappointed. Even Quarl was gone, and had taken Disko with him; and there was no further news of Colonel Myddleton.

Then came a long letter from Mr. Fairfax, very heart-broken and gentle, thanking Miss St. John or her great kindness, and saying he hoped to avail himself of it soon, and come to Enderby. He ended by saying, "Sir Henry says, 'Make her happy!' God knows how gladly I would do so, at any price. Believe me, dear Miss St. John, that

nothing on earth, fortune, rank, or *religion*, should stand in her way, if, by so yielding, I could win that poor child to stay a little longer with me. Ask her anything you like, tell her anything you will, make her any promise, I will fulfil it to the letter and the life ! ”

Hermione laid the letter down thoughtfully. “ This,” she thought, “ makes all things clearer to me. He, too, guesses there is something ! Poor darling ! I will now see what I can do ! ”

Josline was lying on a couch, drawn close to the window, in the “ pearl ” chamber. The last two days had shown a marked change in her ; her breathing was more rapid and uneven, the cough more frequent, and the fever more acute. She was partially asleep now, her small hands hung down by her, her lips were half unclosed, and now and then a word or two seemed to escape her. She was dressed in a loose white wrapper, and her delicate head lay back on the white pillow, hardly less colourless than her face. The windows stood wide open, and a bowl of sweet peas and honeysuckle made an atmosphere of perfume round her. Her eyelids and temples were not less delicately veined than the flower petals.

Hermione came softly through the door, which stood ajar, and remained looking at her. Suddenly, without known reason, Josline opened her eyes ; she smiled, half wonderingly, half dreamily, at her friend, and then said, faintly—

“How beautiful you look to-day, Hermione!”

“Darling!” said Miss St. John, coming quickly up to her, and, kneeling down by her, she took the little hands, soft and pale as two lily petals, and kissed them softly. Josline leant her head sideways till it fell against the golden glory of Hermione’s.

“I am sure I am a great trouble to you,” she whispered. “I did not mean to be so weak; but I am always tired now.”

“You are not a trouble, indeed!” said Hermione, earnestly. “I love having you here; you are so sweet and good, and never complain.”

Josline released one of her hands, and pushing back Miss St. John’s face, she looked at her with such an intense, sorrowful gaze, that the eyes of the latter filled with tears.

“It will not be very long, perhaps,” she said, and stopped.

Hermione’s heart beat thickly, and suddenly she could contain herself no more; she hid her face against Josline’s pillow, and said, “Oh! do, do let me make you happy!” Then she dared not look up. She felt Josline trembling violently, and she felt her make an effort to withdraw her other hand; but she could not yield it, and there was a short silence, broken only by the sharp, hard breathing of Josline.

“Josline,” she whispered at last; “speak to me. Are you angry?”

"No," said Josline with a gasp. "Hush! I am trying to say something."

Again a long pause, then Josline raised herself a little, drew up Hermione's head, and, holding her face between her two hot hands and speaking rapidly, she gasped out—

"No one can; I have promised, I must keep it, but she didn't know how good he is. I am so sorry!" and she broke down in long, tearless sobs, that wrung Hermione's heart.

"My darling," she urged, "what have you promised—Miss Barbara? No? Then who? Your uncle says that there is nothing on earth he cares for except your being happy—nothing, Josline. No, don't turn away and hide your face; listen, darling, listen, these are his words, 'Fortune, rank, and *religion*;' he doesn't mind anything, dear child, only be happy, or let us make you so. You must know that Robert Watt loves you devotedly, and is nearly broken-hearted because——" Here she stopped, then added hurriedly, "I will give him a thousand a year, then no one can say anything. Oh! Josline, *do* be happy!" She stopped again, for she was quite alarmed at the terrible tearless sobs which now shook the fragile girl from head to foot. "Hush! darling, hush!" she said soothingly: "we will do all you wish, only try and be calm."

"Oh! it isn't that, I don't want to be happy," gasped Josline, clutching at the delicate work of her

wrapper. "It is—it is that I have deceived you all, and him most."

"Robert?"

"No, Dux, my uncle, only he won't mind, because he loved her so. Give me time, I will tell you all;" and she turned towards the window as though she were really dying.

"Yes, I will wait as long as you like, my dearest; do not grieve so, I dare say it can all be put right;" and Hermione raised her in her arms and wiped her damp brow and streaming eyes. After a little while it all came out, bit by bit, and little by little.

It appeared that young Mrs. Fairfax, passionately attached to her religion, and forced to bring her child up as a Protestant, had had her secretly baptized by a priest of her own faith, according to the Romish ritual, and had made the little child solemnly swear to her, when she was dying, that she would profess on coming of age; and had also made her take a solemn vow never to marry a Protestant. She trusted to the love of her brother-in-law not to leave her child dowerless and unprovided for, even under a change of faith.

There lay the mystery of Josline's whole life. The priest who had baptized her had died the year following, before her mother, or otherwise, on her mother's death, complications might have arisen.

Hermione was utterly confounded. What remained to be done? Nothing. The one imperative



object to achieve in the present time was to calm and soothe the frightful nervous excitement of Josline; who, now that the whole barrier of her life had given way, was in such an extreme state of misery and terror as to be hardly rational. Hermione gathered her to her again and again, kissing and soothing her, and assuring her of every one's only redoubled love and sympathy. "To think what you must have gone through all these years!" she shuddered. "How unutterably awful!" No wonder it had undermined so fragile a constitution as Josline's, and then the super-added weight of love for Robert had just been the excess which had drawn down the balance for life and death.

It was an awful thought, that in the effort of love to save her child's soul, Mrs. Fairfax had sacrificed her life.

When Josline was a little calmer, Hermione said, gently, "You will wish Mr. Fairfax to know now, my darling, will you not?"

"Oh, yes; it has killed me!" said Josline, quietly. "And I know he will forgive me; he always understood."

"And—and Robert? I think he ought for his own sake," added Hermione, sadly, thinking what a crushing blow this would be to the entire life of the young man.

"Yes, he ought, I know, but," here Josline raised herself, a look of awful gladness came into those

ethereal eyes, "tell him, too!"—(she seemed to make no doubt Miss St. John was to do the whole thing; somehow, those who came to Hermione for help never seemed to doubt her power and willingness to perform) —"Tell him that though I cannot marry him, I have never loved any one else, and I shall never live to do so. In Heaven——" She sank back insensible.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

HERMIONE went slowly downstairs, with a very heavy heart. Josline was quiet now; exhausted and weak she had sunk back into a state of semi-unconsciousness. Mrs. Match was sitting in the next room, and would stay there till Hermione returned.

Miss St. John crossed the hall, and went and stood in the breezy porch. The hall door faced north and was always full of cool airs, even in these hot summer days. She leaned her head against the side of the carved stone pillars, and thought sorrowfully of the great anguish she was going to convey to Mr. Fairfax and poor Robert Watt. The last chance of saving that delicate life was gone. Why should it fall on her, this melancholy task? Yet, what more of grief could matter much to her—when all gladness and possible happiness had gone from her? Still, it did seem terrible that gloom on gloom should fall on those connected with her. She had hoped so strongly that she might be able to make Josline happy, at

least, and that, in seeing her young life revive, she herself might find a fresh source of happiness.

Having witnessed the utter breaking down of Josline's reserve this afternoon, and having been brought in such close contact with suffering and love-abnegation, seemed to have unnerved her. How weak she was! Why, if this fragile child—for she was scarcely more—had been able to bear such a burden for so long, could she, in her strength and health, not do so likewise? Why was she so haunted, this day, by the memory of that melancholy face—those pleading eyes of his? It must be that she was overwrought and tired. It did seem so sad to think of Robert Watt—the crushing misery this must prove to him. Was there, then, no happiness in the world? Was every one in any way connected with her to be always full of unsatisfied longing and aching pain? First, there had been poor Mark, killed in the prime of his life, loving her so devotedly, dying unrequited. Then there had been her own lost happiness, and *his* wrecked life, on which she did not dare to dwell. Now Robert Watt and Josline; and then, too, Gladys! It was a tangled, grievous, miserable web, and, for the first time in her life, Hermione's brave spirit seemed to quail within her and to fail from power to surmount this constantly turning wheel, which, with each fresh revolution, appeared only to bring fresh grief and sadness to all those for whom she cared.

Jerks, who had been sleeping on the lawn, sud-

denly sat up, perked one ear in the air, and gave a low yelp.

A horseman came rapidly up the rhododendron drive. Absently, Hermione stood watching him listlessly. She noticed, without seeing, that he drew his horse into a slower canter and guided it on to the turf at the side, as though anxious to approach unheard. He could not see her, for she stood well within the porch. The circumstance did not strike her as peculiar ; she was far too deeply absorbed in thought of other things, to care who came and went. And one or two of the overseers were constantly riding about, and doubtless they had heard Miss Fairfax was ill, and were anxious to avoid making the slightest noise. She thought all this vaguely, without thinking as it were, her mind running in a curious double groove.

Suddenly, something in the way the rider sat, stirred some vague corner of her memory, and brought vividly to her brain the recollection of her dream that last night but one at Charteriss, when she had seen Colonel Myddleton riding up the avenue on Falcon, coming to fetch her. She had dreamt him dead, and had not cared, for he was coming to her and that cancelled every doubt.

At this moment the recollection was exquisitely painful to her—it struck an aching chord that, overstrung, quivered on the very life pulse of her heart. She stood still for one second, trying in vain for self-control ; then the whole tide of her misery, grew

greater than she could bear, and, falling slowly back into the hall, she covered her face with her hands and sobbed in utter loneliness and hopelessness. What did it signify whether she wept or not? Who was there to care or to grieve for it? All her life she must live now for others, and yet not for the only one under God's sun who had been all in all to her; and who, far apart and fighting his lonely way, must never look her in the face again. All whom she had cared for had died, or gone, or past by on the other side. Her grand nature, broken down at last, gave way in a paroxysm of misery and despair, that was as overwhelming as her self-control had been strong.

The horseman, to whom she had not given another thought, concluding that he would pass on by one of the intersecting avenues, had come steadily on to the front door.

Hermione was standing at the foot of the stairs, partially supported by the pillared baluster at their foot. Her tall and beautiful figure was thus thrown into strong relief against the dark oak, her head was buried in her hands, and the hot tears were rushing through the long, slender fingers, whilst her whole frame rocked with her sobs.

Jerks, in wild distress, was alternately jumping on her or sitting at her feet, whining and yelping in short, sharp barks of sympathy and distress.

“Hermione!”

She dropped her hands, and then, with a face from which every shade of colour fled, she recoiled.

In another moment she was in his arms, for the man who had called her name, with that sound so piercingly full of an almost awful gladness, was Colonel Myddleton.

For a few seconds they were both speechless, then Hermione withdrew herself a little and looked in his face with such a terrible wordless look of entreaty, that he dropped even her hands, and said, whilst his whole face and frame quivered and beat with emotion. "You believe in me, Hermione, don't you? You know I would not be here, if all were not well?"

Her white lips did not utter, but he saw she did.

"Give me your hands, darling, if you trust me," he said. "God bless you, it is all right."

"Is she dead?" at last Hermione managed to say.

"Dead? No, thank God! Well and happy, and married yesterday."

Hermione burst into tears again, and all she could say was, "God is so good! God is so good!"

After a short time they adjourned to the bay chamber, and Colonel Myddleton told Hermione how it all happened.

It appeared he had gone down to Southampton and met Lady Crewe, who had struck him as being much altered, very quiet, and timid, and shy. However, very little had been said till the following day, when she had sent for him just as they were on the point of starting for London, where he believed she was going to remain with an old aunt, her only living



relative, that he knew of ; and, with much confusion and many incoherent apologies, she had confessed to him that she was deeply attached to a cousin of hers, who had been private secretary to the commander-in-chief, and whom she had met constantly in the year following Sir Walter's death, and had, in fact, become engaged to him before leaving India ; that he had only spoken to her the day following her letter to Colonel Myddleton, begging him to meet the *Hydaspes* ; that everything had been settled in a great hurry ; that he had persuaded her to allow him to go to England by the *Hydaspes* and make arrangements for their immediate marriage, and that she was to follow in the *Mirzapore*, and explain all the circumstances to Colonel Myddleton on landing. She herself implored his forgiveness, and then, with naïve entreaty, begged him to give her away !

Colonel Myddleton had gone to her just after receiving Hermione's few words of farewell, and the revulsion was extreme. Lady Crewe had always known he did not care for her, "more than for any other poor, unhappy, ill-treated little creature he could be good to," as she expressed it, and consequently she had been terribly shocked at his extreme agitation. She could not understand, and could only break down and cry, and say he was so good, when he wrung her hands and blessed her, and promised to come up to town with her and do anything she wished about her wedding. Well, he had gone ; she could not be

married so quickly as they had at first hoped. He had seen the cousin, who was a capital good fellow, and extremely grateful to Colonel Myddleton for all the trouble he took in arranging matters, and who had been quickly won by the soldierly, open bearing of the Mutiny hero, though he had, perhaps, been a little inclined at first to be jealous of him by description. Colonel Myddleton had refrained from writing one word of this to Hermione, as he wanted to come down and make his peace in person, if possible. "And now, Hermione, I am free," he ended, and he held out to her his two hands, trembling like reeds, in the intense stream of his love and humility.

Hermione bent her head till he saw only the crown of her golden hair, and placed both her hands in his in silence.

"Will you trust me, then?" he asked, bending till his grand head nearly met hers. "God bless you, my love; I will not fail you."

So at the extreme tension of her life, God's Angel had smitten the chords of living in one grand harmony of peace and rest.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

“PHIL! PHIL! I really shall die for joy! I really shall die for joy! I really shall die for joy!” cried Lady Clinton, rushing wildly into the library in Park Lane, seizing her husband by the neck, and hugging him ecstasically. “You dear old darling boy, don’t look like an undertaker, but just listen, Hermione is engaged to Colonel Myddleton; there! I always told you so; and they will be the most delightful and perfect couple that ever lived.” Here, out of breath, Dorothy fell on her knees by Sir Philip’s chair, and kissed him over and over.

Sir Philip, who had been reading a letter himself, looked up, and said, “I am very glad, really, that’s awfully nice; but I say, Dor, read this.”

Lady Clinton, a little damped by her husband’s unusual quietude, took the offered letter. She started, and turned a little pale at the beginning, then read on hurriedly. At last she folded it quietly and laid it gently down again. “Oh, Phil, I am *so* sorry!” she

said, in a low voice ; “ it does seem sad. Fancy, poor old Bob ! ”

“ Yes, so am I sorry,” answered Sir Philip, turning away from her a little, and staring hard out of the window. “ I can’t think how he will bear it, it’s hard lines.”

Dorothy continued stroking a crease slowly and gently out of his coat sleeve.

“ Poor, poor Mr. Fairfax ! ” she whispered, at last. “ But why don’t they have first-rate advice—send for Sir Henry ? Oh, I’ll write and remind Ione ; she would in a minute,” and she half rose.

“ It’s all no good, Bob says they had him down ; he it was who gave up hope. But the worst of all is, I think, her being a Roman Catholic, it will break old Fairfax’s heart ; dear, kind old man ! ”

“ Fancy the duplicity of it, all these years ! ” said Dorothy.

“ She thought, of course, it was all right, poor child. Well, I do believe it has killed her.”

“ I wonder Ione hasn’t written to me,” said Dorothy, suddenly.

“ Why, wasn’t it from her you heard of the engagement ? ”

“ Oh dear, no ! Colonel Myddleton’s valet came and told Meadows ; he knew we should be so glad, he said ! ” and she couldn’t help laughing a little. At this moment a footstep was heard, and she sprang to her feet just as Smith, the butler, opened the door.

"I beg your pardon, my lady, I picked this up in the hall."

"Why, it is a letter from Ione! I must have overlooked it and dropped it."

She tore it open. It briefly stated the fact of her engagement, and then went into a long account of Josline's illness, and all their sorrow for her; it ended by saying Colonel Myddleton was coming up to London the day it was written, and would call on the following day. "Why, that's to day!" said Dorothy, "now we shall hear."

During the afternoon he came, and he told them all they wanted to know. Gladys was dreadfully overcome, almost as much by the discovery of Josline's religion as by the fact of her fatal illness. Sir Henry had been down again, and thought now the end would be even more rapid than he had at first anticipated. The shock of revealing her secret, and the knowledge that the revealing had been such a grief and bar to Robert, had caused a rapid acceleration of fever and weakness. She had seen no one except Hermione; her uncle had been sent for, all excitement was to be studiously avoided, and she was to be kept as quiet and calm as possible.

Robert was in a terrible state, half frantic at first, but the knowledge that he could never have won her, and at the same time that she was passing away to where "there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage," seemed to have half stunned him after the first wildness of grief.

Of course all idea of festivity at Enderby was entirely at an end.

Hermione hardly ever left Josline, who clung to her more and more ; and it seemed, indeed, that the great happiness that had come to Miss St. John only drew closer the feeling of clinging love which had sprung up in sorrow and mutual sympathy.

Hour after hour, by day and by night, Miss St. John sat by the side of the gentle, dying girl, who was never so calm, even during the fits of restlessness that supervened after each paroxysm of coughing, as when Hermione was holding her hand in silence. Mr. Fairfax had written, saying he was coming, but leaving the exact date unfixed ; and day by day Robert's face grew thinner and graver. He had implored for one sight of her, but Hermione dared not grant it till the uncle had arrived, and they had seen how she could bear excitement, for it seemed to Hermione imperative that that meeting should take place under the most favourable conditions possible.

Josline had never mentioned Robert's name since that fatal afternoon ; but Hermione thought she knew when he was in the house by the dilation of her eye now and then, and the quiver of all her limbs when his voice was now and again heard in the garden. But Miss St. John would not advert to him, for she felt that every excitement must be avoided. Once or twice Josline asked for her uncle, but this had ceased, and she generally lay still and drowsy and passive.

He came at last, one dewy, still evening. A knock came to the door, it opened, and there he stood, the tall, stately old man with his violin case in one hand. He put it down, and half advanced into the quiet dimly lighted room. "Anima," he said, softly, "I have brought you the Liebens-würdiges Ding."

"She is asleep," said Hermione, in a whisper, looking fearfully in his face, to see how he would bear the change in her. She was lying with her head on Hermione's breast, and never moved.

"Ah!" he answered, as low, "poor little, darling child! I will wait." So he sat down and proceeded to take out the violin and prepare it, without, as far as Hermione could judge, even looking at Josline. He was learning the room and trying to use his eyes in the dim light.

Presently she stirred, and moaned faintly, then she opened her eyes and said, so low, that Hermione only caught the words, "I thought I heard the violin."

As she spoke, Mr. Fairfax drew out one long, throbbing note, that passed through the dusk like a pearl on a silver string. Josline's eyes lighted up with a strange and beautiful gleam. She tightened her hold on Hermione's hand, but did not speak, as the violin went on, "Oh for the wings, for the wings of a dove! Far away, far away would I rove," and then through all the exquisite modulations, till it came to the ending strain, "And remain there for ever at rest, And remain there for ever at rest!"



“At rest!” she murmured, “at rest!” and she closed her eyes, speechless again.

Mr. Fairfax's head was down on the instrument, his tears rained fast and hot; those few seconds seemed to have parted him more than years from his sweet, lost Josline.

Hermione dared not move. Presently, Josline moved again, and put out one slender hand, wanderingly. “Dux!” she said, softly, “are you there? Come to me.”

“Yes, my child, I am here, little one.” With marvellous self-control, he checked his tears, and laying his violin aside, he came up to her bed, or rather sofa, for she was lying on that, drawn to the window. He bent over her, and she gazed at him with the solèmn look that had been growing in her eyes for the last few days. She lifted her hands towards him like a little child. “Take me,” she said.

Hermione slid from her low seat, and as he took it, she laid the slight burden on his breast.

“Dux, you are not vexed?” she whispered, with her mouth against his face as he bent still lower over her.

A strong shudder convulsed him. “No, my darling, never! Oh, Anima mia, I loved you so!” It was the only appeal he made against her silence of years.

“Yes, I know,” she whispered; “but it could not be helped, I tried to tell you that once, do you re-

member, when we were coming home?" and she lifted her hand to his leaning face, with the back of it towards him—a caressing gesture she had always employed from a very little child, and only to him.

He choked back his sobs, for he feared agitating her beyond control. Hermione had gone gently into the sitting-room beyond hearing, but not beyond calling.

"Do you remember," she said, looking up again, "what you said once, that you would not mind anything she had wished?"

"Yes, I remember," he answered, the words wrung from him.

"And did you mean it, dear?" she added, a little wistfully.

"Yes, I meant it then, and now."

"Kiss me, Dux; you always understood; I knew I could trust you," she said, with a quiet sob of fatigue.

He gathered her to him with ineffable love and reverence, and kissed her solemnly.

"I will tell mamma," she murmured, "you always understood."

For a short time, nestled against him, she seemed to rest, and he did not move. Then the coughing began, and Hermione came back. Directly she saw Josline's face, she noticed a change.

"Are you very tired, my darling?" she said, lifting the pillow away, and putting a fresh cool one in its place.

“No, I am not tired. I should like Dux to play.”

He laid her down, the little weight he felt hardly more than his violin, and taking it up he drew out a chord or two.

“Auf Wiedersehen!” she murmured, and he played it.

“Es ist bestimmt in Gottes Rath das man vom liebsten was man hat muss scheiden.”

Her breathing grew irregular and faint. He went on, over and over, and always she said, “Go on.”

A great restlessness came on her; the heat was intense. The evening drew on. On Hermione came down a solemn awe.

Suddenly she turned, and said, “I hear Robert; I want to say good-bye.”

Hermione left the room at once. He was pacing the hall, listening to the violin, the tears were running down his cheeks. She put out her hand to him, he followed her in silence.

They entered softly, the room was almost entirely dark now, the evening breeze had risen, the lace curtains were blowing about, and the moon was slowly coming up the sky; so intense was the silence outside, that each little leaf round the window clapped soft applause to the violin. The player you could not see, his figure was lost in the folds of the night's falling curtain; the music sounded like a spirit-voice from another land.

Josline had been raised a little, and her exquisite

head was cut like a luminous gem against her pillows ; her eyes were half open only, the veined lids seemed too heavy ; you could see no breathing from the parted lips, but her breast rose and fell quietly. She had crossed her transparent hands, and the one point of colour was her mother's ring—the ruby heart caught a gleam of moonlight and burnt in intense light on the ivory finger.

Robert was suffocating with emotion.

“ Speak to her,” said Hermione, leading him forwards, and pressing his arm to make him kneel.

He sank down at once, not daring to touch her, and he said, in a voice full of pathetic anguish, “ Josline ! ”

Even on the border-land, she heard him, she did not move or open her eyes, but she said, “ Yes.”

“ I have come to say good-bye,” he sobbed.

“ Yes.” Then she opened her beautiful eyes ; alas ! they were breaking fast ; and seemed to make an effort to rouse back to life and love. “ Take—my—ring,” she murmured, in a faint, far-away voice. “ Fiel pero desdichado. I always loved you.”

“ Shall I kiss you ? ” he said, suddenly urged by some instinct he could not define.

Her head turned a little, fell over towards him, and she smiled.

Awfully, solemnly, the young man stooped over her and pressed a kiss on her pale forehead.

“ Oh for the wings !—rest, peace, love ! ” she sighed.

Her head fell a little lower; the smile stayed on the alabaster face.

Hermione drew him back a little space.

“Oh for the wings, for the wings of a dove!  
Far away, far away would I rove,  
In the wilderness build me a nest,  
And remain there for ever at rest,  
And remain there for ever at rest!”

On went the violin, swaying on rushing melody. Wings, it seemed, were in the room, beautiful wings of the angels, fire-pointed, white, soul-bearing.

The moon rose fully and flooded them all—the bowed violin player, the tall man and woman, who, with their hands linked, as she had drawn him back, stood gazing on the quiet, sweet, dead face of Josline Fairfax.

In the profound hush and stillness outside, the little creeper leaves folded themselves to rest, the long, dark shadows lay solemnly on the lawn, the great cedars held the moonlight in check.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

It was all over; the silent sorrow and burden of the young life.

To Hermione had come the perfecting of earthly love; to Josline, a better, even a Heavenly. They took her back to Old Court, and laid her by her mother. It might be heathenish, but what cared he? Mr. Fairfax had these words only, carved on the white cross below her name, "Auf Wiedersehen!" They were the last she had ever addressed to him, and who knew whether it was not her farewell as well as her request for the song? He loved to think so. In the long autumn gloamings he would take his violin under his arm, go through the garden to the little lonely churchyard, and play long, beautiful, soft melodies that she had liked.

Miss Barbara, who had sorrowed in her own grim way intensely and terribly, would murmur that if there never had been cholera, now he would be sure to bring it; but she never interfered beyond this. The grief for Josline's loss had changed her very much,

it had made her more taciturn, but also less prone to find fault. The doves came down as pearly clouds in the windy mornings, and "rumbled in their throats" to their hearts' content; they were never "sh—d!" at now. The "person of the house" grew into an aged and demure mouser, and became more and more cossetted and made of.

Nan brought her little boy often for a chat with Mrs. Turgoose, and now and then Miss Barbara made her a handsome present towards his maintenance, for he had been Josline's godchild.

The beautiful Madonna-head had gone to the stewardry at Enderby, but the lily's heart hung, where it had always hung, in the den, and Mr. Crosbie came often to look at it, and to talk over and over again of the strange, lonely, inner life Josline must have led, and of how sadly it had sapped her young life.

What Mr. Fairfax thought exactly on the subject was never known. No one had dared approach it except Miss Barbara, and the first time, with her even, was the last. It was after a burst of grief over Josline's loss, the day of the funeral, that she had suddenly broken out into a wild tirade against the mother, the Pope, and finally Josline. Mr. Fairfax let her rave to the end, till, exhausted, she had broken down in inarticulate sounds and cries. Still, he maintained silence. She turned to him with a kind of scream, and said—



“Will you never speak, never say anything against even such base ingratitude as this?”

“Yes,” he answered, suddenly facing round on her, “for once and for ever, and then the Silence shall take this grief as every other. Well, you know, imperious and hard-hearted woman, that your brother won the love of that most unhappy Alice Vavasour, tempted her to forsake all, break her faith with her religion and family, and marry him. And how did he treat her? Neglected her, tortured her, wrung her heart, broke it, flung her aside, and left her to die, scorned by her own people, beggared, and alone. I brought her here, she and her poor little innocent child, to die, murdered by my own brother’s hand—the only woman I had ever loved, for whom *I* would have abnegated kindred and faith, not tempted her to renounce hers; I brought her home here to die, I, the rich brother she had refused for the worthless fool who had deserted her. And she trusted me,” he went on, with his whole face working and quivering with passion and hard-held agony. “And, God knows, I will never betray that trust; taunt me, if you dare, hard sister of a wicked, worthless man, who, not satisfied with killing his wife, has now taken the life of his innocent child!” He drew his breath in hard sobs of despairing pain, and then hurried on, “I have let you have your say, and now I have had mine. It has burned and raged within me till my heart is ashes and my life a stone; but never, never

more, as long as you or I live, raise your voice against that unhappy sister of yours, or her child."

With that he had wrung his hands together and gone from her, bowed and weeping, leaving her utterly stunned and paralyzed with amazement at his misery and wrath. So, then, this was the secret of his lonely, valetudinarian, loveless, aimless life. This was the man who had always appeared so hard and dry a chip, more like a roll of parchment, than a living person, except as regarded Josline; this was the secret, this!

It left her in amazement. The force, the passion stirred from that riven nature by this last agonizing sorrow, awed her; and truly, never again did she dare to revert either to Mrs. Fairfax or Josline, save in a low tone of kindness and remorse.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

HERMIONE had gone through so much anxiety and sorrow, that the climax of Josline's death entirely broke her down for the time being, and Sir Henry, being called into consultation, advised perfect rest, quiet, and change of scene.

It ended in her joining old Lady Dunstable, and travelling with her for a short, quiet tour in the Tyrol. They took their own carriage, and posted through the beautiful valleys of the Engadine, and on into Styria. Colonel Myddleton acted as courier, and gradually Hermione recovered her spirits and strength again.

She wrote regularly, and heard regularly from Robert Watt; she had been most anxious he should accompany her, but it appeared as though no earthly force would ever again tear him from Enderby. He wrote word that the whole estate was in the most perfect and beautiful order, and that they were only waiting her return to give her a welcome that should make the county ring.

One morning early, Robert was sent for to the Manor-house, and found, to his amaze, that instead of doing something or other for Mrs. Match, he was met by Hermione and Colonel Myddleton, in the hall. They had arrived the night before.

"How sorry every one will be!" he said, a little vexed. "They had made such a preparation!"

"It will come in for our wedding feast, then," said Hermione, with an exquisite blush. "We were married a fortnight ago, and have come home to stay."

Robert turned a little pale, then his grave face lighted with a wonderful smile, and he said, "God bless you!" and walked away.

He guessed why she had not asked him to the wedding. The whole change in her grief and joy had come with the darkening of his life.

Indeed, Hermione had been married very quietly—her only bridesmaid had been Gladys, for she was still so far from being strong, as to be obliged to avoid as much as possible any over-fatigue and excitement.

In the evening, as Hermione and Marmaduke stood side by side under the cedars, Robert came out to them, looking very shy. He put in her hands a small case, and then begged Colonel Myddleton to take a turn with him on the terraces.

Hermione waited till they had gone down the first flight of steps, then undid the case. Inside was apparently a pad of washleather, roughly sewn together,

and on a slip of paper was written, "From us, Robert and Josline."

She pulled apart the large loose stitches, and held in her hand the Eurydice portrait. How well she remembered Miss Barbara's description of the picture! She was very much overcome, and, sitting down on the garden seat, facing the window within which Josline had sat the day of Sir Henry's visit, she thought over again all her loss and grief for the gentle, loving Josline Fairfax.

When Robert at length came back, she put her hand speechlessly in his, but he saw by her eyes full of dewy light how greatly she felt his gift.

"Colonel Myddleton says we may have the rejoicings as soon as we can get ready," he said, quickly. "I suppose you don't mind?"

"No," she said, with a happy smile; "I mind nothing. The Clintons, the Temples, Lady Dunstable, and Quarl, come the day after to-morrow; so let us make haste and get everything ready for them!"

It was a glorious afternoon when they all arrived.

Standing on the steps to receive them, was Hermione, and, just within, Colonel Myddleton. Her tall, slender height showed to perfection in the closely fitting violet velvet dress, and, over all, the small head, with its coronal of hair, rose gladly and freely erect.

Quarl was the first person to jump down and advance towards her, making low bows and obeisances, like an Indian salaaming.

"This is, of course, the order of the day," he said, gravely. "I have been perfecting myself all the way here."

Disko, on his master's shoulder, was following suit with commendable alacrity.

"To think that you are married at last!" said Mina Temple, giving her a rose leaf kiss; "and by the bishop, too, who wouldn't marry me, saying he never married anybody!"

"So un-biblical!" growled Quarl. "They ought to have one wife."

"Oh, Hermione!" from Dorothy, who hugged her tight.

"Stunning lot of deer, Miss St. John—I mean Myddleton—I mean Mrs. ——" from Sir Philip, who at last got so confused, that Quarl loudly suggested to him that "'Duchess' was the feminine of 'Duke.'"

Silence from Gladys, who clung tremblingly to Hermione, and dared not speak for fear of crying, seeing that tall figure in the background, dressed in deep mourning. Robert and Gladys had not met since Josline's death, and they both felt it acutely now—he thinking of his shy, fragile, lost love; she of his utter, quiet sorrow. His being in black struck Gladys with a kind of horror; for the first time she seemed to realize all his loss had been to him. She looked at his hand, but Josline's ring was not on any of his fingers; it was too sacred. He wore it on a thin gold chain round his neck, and carefully hidden away.

There was a good deal of talk and discussion, and much merriment and confusion; but at last they all settled down. Disko was brought in and re-introduced to Jerks; and then they seemed to fall back very much to their ordinary ways of talking and pairing off, except that, of course, it was Colonel Myddleton who did everything for Hermione, whereas, formerly, he had always been the one to hold back. In fact, Sir Philip was quite irate, and at last took refuge with Robert, and made him tell him everything that was going to be done.

“They are just as bad as lovers who have died and come to life again!” he said, with the happy choice of subjects habitual to him when at all nervous. “Of course, I don’t mean anything personal,” he added, by way of a better conclusion. “Hang it all!” he observed to Lady Clinton, with whom he at length subsided. “The fact is, I can’t stand the look of that fellow’s eyes; they are so wretched!”

“Of poor Bob, do you mean?”

“Yes. I wish to Heaven he would do something or other. I would even rather he married Gladys, I do declare!”

“You are such a dear, kind old boy,” said Dorothy, with a leap of joy at her heart, though really she felt almost horrid to think of such a thing there and then. “I don’t think Gladys looks very well, do you?”

“Gladys? Oh, yes; all right!” he said, with brotherly satisfaction. “But Hermione, as you call



her, is really superb. I knew it only wanted marriage to complete her. And hasn't she just got Duke under her thumb, by Jove ! ”

“ I am sure she doesn't mean to, then,” answered Dorothy, looking at Gladys, near whom Robert had sat down, though without speaking, for the first time that evening. “ She always said wives ought to give in to their husbands ; and she thinks it, too.”

“ So you all say till you are wives, my dear,” said Sir Philip, with lazy kindness ; “ and then you play the—— ”

“ Hush, Phil ! you are really too bad ! It's living with that queer Quarl. By-the-by, I don't believe Hermione ever really asked him here. I asked her just now, and she said, ‘ Why, you did ! ’ as if I should dream of such a thing ! and, only fancy, he overheard, and went off into a fit of laughter. I think he is a wretch ! ”

“ Most monkeys are ! ” said Quarl's voice, at her elbow. “ But what are those they imitate, if their imitation is so detestable ? ”

Sir Philip burst into a roar of smothered laughter, at Dorothy's face.

Gladys did not dare address Robert, but sat still, trying to hide the tremour of her hands. At last, he said to her, very gently, and quite unlike his old teasing way—

“ I'm very glad you came too, Gladys.”

To which she found nothing better to say, than,

“ Oh ! I'm very glad ! ” a kind of *tu quoque* which did not materially aid the conversation.

Again there was a pause. Gladys felt that these pauses were dangerous things, and her mind was so full of his grief that she quite dreaded saying Josline's name, for she did not think he could bear it. It had seemed impossible to her that he should have become so different. She had always thought of him as the merry companion of all her childish pranks and games—she had teased and lectured him and kept him in order, and never hardly been serious or at her highest with him ; but this grave, quiet, sad-looking young man, in his deep mourning, was quite another Robert altogether, not the merry, frolicking Bob of old times. His grief had placed a measureless space between them ; she felt awed and subdued and shy, as though he had grown years older and cleverer and better in some undefined and intangible manner—so great is the power of a deep and life-lasting sorrow, so ennobling the effects of a true and passionate love.

She did not understand, but she pitied, with a yearning pain at her heart to console and comfort him ; but, young as she was, her feminine nature understood that time alone and silence could ever build a pathway on which they two might meet as of old. She sat now silent and subdued, and he did not speak either ; fond as he was of Gladys, he had always thought her slightly superficial. He had not imagined any one could understand Josline, not even Miss St.

John, certainly not the little girl cousin who was to him a pretty plaything, like a charming white kitten. How could such a merry little being understand the exquisite subtlety of Josline's organization—she whose very person had been so ethereal and fragile that she gave even the poor of the village of Old Court the impression of being a flower or an angel ? It was, of course, impossible. Gladys had not even loved her, as girls do each other—very tenderly and beautifully. Hermione had done so ; but then he acknowledged that Miss St. John was unlike most other people, and she was the only person to whom he ever spoke of his dead love. To him Josline had been a soul—hardly a person, in the ordinary acceptance of the word ; something so divine and pure that when he had touched her, it was almost as one who should lift a sacramental cup. A sacrament to him, indeed, had been her love and her death. The utmost strength and nobleness of his whole life seemed to have awoke at the touch of her dying face, in the last farewell, those few months ago. A supreme benediction still held his heart in thrall, still echoed to him in the dying gentleness of her last words : “ I always loved you.” All, all was gone now, he should never be what he might have been. There was nothing worth living for, nothing worth struggling for. But this was only revulsion, reaction after the months of anxiety that had followed on his rejection and her illness. In reality, Robert would never have become

the man he eventually did, dependable, strong, enduring, and gentle-hearted, had he not suffered such extreme of grief in his youth.

Josline's loss awoke in him nobility and strength, but they did not die from him with her gentle presence. They remained like the first blossoms on a noble growth, and grew with him till he died.

At the present time all other companionship, all sympathy, even unexpressed, jarred on him. And poor Gladys's tremulous manner and brimming eyes offended him into a kind of fretful indifference.

She was not aware of his coldness of feeling; but she was sensible of the great change in his manner as well as appearance, and it only made her more nervous and quiet. She, too, was going through her ordeal.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

At last the great day came. Early in the morning the tenantry rode and drove in, or came in groups on foot. Old men and old women, husbands and wives, young men, women, and children. There were many hundreds, but there was room for all, and tents to shelter them in case of inclement weather.

All day feasting was going on, bands played, speeches were made, healths drunk, and in the evening there was a grand dance in the great tent, and the gardens were illuminated.

Hermione and Colonel Myddleton had come out to speak to their people, after the dinner, on the steps of the porch. And, after a few words from herself, her husband made a short speech, to which the oldest farmer on the estate made an equally short reply.

“Bless you both !” he said. “And ye shall be blessed, for the fruits of good living will live after to-day ; and cast away all care, for the Lord careth for ye, and in His own good time it shall come to pass, and they twain were one flesh.”

Shouts, cheers, the band striking up "God save the Queen," ended this extraordinary half blessing, half exordium. The old man, half deaf, wholly blind, was led away by his great grandson, rubbing his brown hand softly over his silvery hair and murmuring, "Give 'em Scriptur, give it 'em well, that they may remember their Creator in the days of their youth, and be a silvery blessing to old age."

The rest of those near pressed up, rank by rank, to shake hands heartily with the bride and bridegroom. They almost all knew and loved Hermione, and they thought Colonel Myddleton a "fine sort."

"What are you doing?" said Gladys to Quarl later on, coming suddenly on him employed in cutting some sentences deeply in the finest cedar tree.

He gave no answer, but made a truly Mephistophelian face.

"What a long sentence you have cut!" she said, curiously trying to look over his raised elbow.

He stopped suddenly, and flung down his knife, as the blade broke off short. "There! I've finished; I hope she'll like it!" and Gladys read—

"Said the duke to the duchess,  
'My dear, you're divine!'  
Said she, 'Well, I thought so,  
For all I have's thine!'"

"How could you?" said Gladys, unable to prevent laughing, "and on that beautiful tree, too! How angry they will be!"

"*They!*" he answered, as a grim and fleeting shadow darkened his sardonically cut face. "Do you suppose I care one straw for *they?*" Then his manner altered to his usual mocking indifference. "I thought when that old buffer blessed them so neatly, I would put it a little more concisely. The fruits of good living will live after to-day, quotha! So they will, in my tree." He picked up his knife, broken and useless, and went slowly away.

"Poor Quarl!" thought Gladys, "I am afraid he loved her, but how could he ever dream that she would care for him?"

Yet such things have been.

Lady Dunstable came in her quiet, stately way, and sat under the tree, when, in the evening, every one was dancing. She had been to see the little "pearl" chamber, and her heart was very full. "Alas! poor child!" she thought. "Did I not foresee this? Did I not warn young Robert Watt? But the young, the young! Faith is the noblest thing in Heaven and earth, and many have died for it. But did any martyr ever die more meek, more enduring, than sweet Josline Fairfax? How hard is the right! how hardly do we know which way to grasp it! and yet, if we let it stand like a Spirit before us, winged, erect, and free, it will lead us through the Silent Land into God's Hereafter, where we shall behold love completed, glorified, and satisfied."

In a pause during the evening, Hermione and



Colonel Myddleton passed down the terraces, along the lighted and glowing paths, till they came to the boat-house. Then he stopped her, and said, "Do you think, Hermione, we could be what we are to each other, if we had not gone through such entire renouncement of ourselves?"

"I do not know," she answered, looking up at him in the dim, soft starlight.

"It was like a death!" he said, folding her closely to him. "That night when I wrote you farewell, I felt as though I had murdered you, and that not even in Heaven could I ever again touch so much as your finger-tip; and yet, Hermione, yet, if it came over again, I pray God I might renounce you even once more."

"And you would!" she said. "I know it; but, oh! do not let us recur to that time, when my whole heart is full of peace and rest." She laid her head against him as she spoke, and they stood silent for a few seconds, bathed from head to foot in perfect trust and love.

"Hermione," he whispered, "did you not dearly love Josline Fairfax?"

"Yes," she answered, thrilling at his tone. "I loved her more than any one in the world but you."

"Then will you wear this for her sake, and forgive its being your own words."

He drew out of his pocket a large crystal, overlying a coil of beautiful silken hair. The crystal was

pierced and cross-barred, so that the peculiar fragrance of the "düftend" hair Mr. Fairfax had so loved, was just perceptible when pressed to Hermione's lips. The crystal was surrounded by small brilliants forming separate letters in a chain and spelling these words:—

"In losing thy Self, thou wilt find thy Soul."

He slung the locket round her neck by a chain of seed pearls, and he said, "I heard you say those words once for Josline, over and over again ; it was one quiet evening, and she had been coughing a good deal."

"Ah ! poor darling !" said Hermione, as the tears welled over. "She has found it now."

"And is *satisfied*," he ended, kissing her bowed head. "She never could have been so here, my Ione, for her whole nature was too pure, too ethereal for earthly life and love. There are some lives that God only completes in Heaven."

THE END.













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